

Blind(ing) Date by cortexikid

Category: IT (2019), IT (Movies - Muschietti), IT - Stephen King

Genre: Ben is trying to set Richie up with his friend, Blind Date, Both Eddie and Stan were brought back from the dead via magic nonsense, Fix-It, Happy Ending, Idiots in Love, Jealous Eddie, Jealousy, Love Confessions, M/M, Mutual Pining, Post-Canon, Richie and Eddie are the best men for Benverly, and make sappy speeches about love, oblivious idiots, out and proud Richie, that happens to bear a striking resemblance to a certain hypochondriac

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Summary:

Life's a bitch and then you die. And then you un-die and life keeps on being a bitch, apparently.

Eddie Kaspbrak comes back from the dead, has an after-life crisis, realises he's in love with his best friend, leaves New York, divorces his wife and dances to some New Kids On The Block. Not necessarily in that order...

1. Blind Date Was A Shitty Show - An Essay By Richard Tozier

Author's Note:

It's my birthday tomorrow (October 9th), so to celebrate, here I am with another Reddie fic. I can't be stopped apparently. Very brief mentions of book canon, namely magic turtles. I'm embracing Stephen's coke-fueled madness as a handy way to bring back our babies from death, 'cause why not. Enjoy :)

"I'm gonna fucking kill you, Haystack."

Ben Hanscom had the decency to look a little sheepish as he took a small sip of his drink.

"Come on, Rich—"

"Nope, no," Richie Tozier cut across his friend with a violent wave of his hand, sloshing his scotch all over Beverly's very expensive-looking rug.

"Not another word outta you, discount Ryan Reynolds, this is *not* happening. No way, Bengay."

“No, You-gay, Tozier,” a new voice cut in, “Does this mean I win the bet?”

Richie and Ben turned to their friend Stanley, who was nonchalantly sipping his water with a thinly veiled smirk on his face.

“You know, I think I liked you better when you were dead,” the comedian shot back quickly and quietly, lest Patricia somehow manage to overhear from another State and rip him a new asshole over it being, *‘far too fucking soon, Tozier.’*

Trust good ol’ Staniel to marry a woman who could vehemently hiss ‘fricking’ and have it somehow sound absolutely, bone-chillingly, terrifying.

Time to float, eat your heart out.

“And I liked you better when you were funny, which, actually, remind me when that was again?”

Richie gaped at him, not missing how Ben coughed his barely-concealed laugh into his glass.

“Harsh, Uris. Harsh.”

Stan leveled him with his patented deadpan stare.

“Nut up or pay up, Richie. No way I went through clown-fueled hell only come back just to watch you hide from the same shit you did when we were kids.”

Richie’s heart hammered in his chest, his palms practically leaking as he watched the short, brunet, incredibly handsome man continue to walk towards them.

“I thought you didn’t believe in hel—”

Stan shoved him, causing Richie to let out an indignant squawk that he would definitely deny later before he collided roughly with said handsome man, narrowly missing his very nice, very tight navy shirt with the remnants of his drink.

“Whoa, easy there, big guy.”

Richie’s heart leapt into his throat as strong hands clasped his shoulders steadying him.

“S-Sorry, man, tripped on Ben’s ugly-ass rug,” he murmured, staring down into warm, hazel eyes.

“Don’t think his fiancée would appreciate you calling it ugly.”

Richie snorted, “No biggie, me and Bev go way back too, so...”

He trailed off, inwardly cursing himself for the level of awkwardness akin to his fourteen year old self forced into a closet with some rando to play Seven Minutes In Heaven.

But he wasn't in the closet now.

Ba dum, tish!

He could practically hear the rest of the Losers in his head groaning at his overused pun, but was soon distracted as the strong hands left his shoulders with a barely perceptible squeeze before one hand reached out towards him.

“I'm Frankie. Ben...told me a lot about you.”

Richie stared, his brain short-circuiting at that information before he forced himself to get with the program and shake the man's hand like he was a normal, functioning human being.

You are neither of those things, asshole.

“All good things, I hope.”

He hated himself so much right now.

Their hands dropped; Frankie's smile widened.

"All great things. I gotta say...I loved your Netflix special, man."

Ah, yes. His Netflix special that somehow became one of the most-watched shows of 2017, the Netflix special that Richie wrote 100% himself and poured his heart and soul into, being brutally honest in a way he never had before. The Netflix special also known as "I'm Coming Out - The Misadventures of Being Gay, Repressed and Deeply Depressed."

But only in his head.

His agent made him pick "Clownin' Around" instead.

Richie still thought his choice was catchier, but to each their own.

"Uh, thanks, yeah I—I had a lot of fun writing that."

He could feel Ben and Stan's eyes boring a hole into the back of his head, making the nape of his neck itch, so he forced his feet forward a little, clearing his throat.

“You uh...you want a drink?”

Smooth, Tozier. You're practically the gay James Dean.

So...just James Dean, then?

His shook his head, trying not to argue further with the inner voice that always sounded just a little too like a certain hypochondriac that had no right being in his mind, especially when a hot stranger was maybe flirting with him.

“Sure, I'd love one.”

They both walked over to Bev's bar, weaving in and out of the many guests that were dancing and talking and laughing merrily, all eager to celebrate their friends' engagement.

The woman of the hour looked up from where she was giving a generous pour of some dubious-looking liquid into six shot glasses.

“Oh! I was just gonna go get you. You found Frankie, I see.”

Her tone was smug, just like it always was when it came to Richie's woeful love life.

“I did,” Richie replied with a quirk of his eyebrow, silently yelling, *‘You’re both gonna pay for this, Marsh!’*

Her answering smile was decidedly unfazed by his telepathic threat.

Instead, she poured two glasses of bourbon and slid them along the counter with the ease of a woman who kept bar more than once in her lifetime.

“Drink up boys, I’m engaged,” she winked, throwing back her own drink in one large gulp.

Never one to be upstaged by Beverly Marsh (even though he was, constantly) Richie took up the glass with a side smile at Frankie. It was when he had the glass pressed to his lips that a very familiar silhouette appeared out of the corner of his eye.

Ice plunged into the depths of Richie’s stomach.

“Hey Eddie!”

Shit, fuck. I’m straight up murdering Ben.

Don’t you mean gay up—

“Hey Bev, Richie, sorry I’m late,” the voice of Eddie Kaspbrak broke through Richie’s internal crisis as he saddled up on the other side of Frankie.

Without meaning to, Richie found himself turning to his friend, gravitating to him like a pathetic plant to the sun, as always.

It was then that he was struck, all over again, with just how much Eddie happened to look remarkably like Richie’s new friend, that Ben had been hounding him about for weeks as the ‘perfect blind date’ for him. Now, it was obvious what made good ol’ Hamburger Helper Boy think that. Seeing the two men side by side, the resemblance was uncanny. Frankie was an inch or so taller, a dozen or so pounds heavier, with noticeably more muscle, but the dark hair and dark eyes really sealed the deal.

Richie was so fucked. And not in the good way.

Oh yeah, Hanscom won’t be so handsome when I’m through with him.

Eddie also looked...good. Not that he didn’t always, but damn, Richie had to admit that divorce looked so fucking *good* on him. Ever since he served his ‘wother’ (a portmanteau of wife/mother that Richie had smartly dubbed Myra in his head) papers when he (along with Stan) was resurrected by a magic space turtle, Eddie had practically glowed. Which probably wasn’t the most important part of that description (resurrection via magic space turtle probably took the cake there, Richie supposed) but it was the most notable of events for Richie - as anything involving Eddie always was.

He walked taller, straighter, with an air of, not quite confidence, but certainly less defeatism than before. He still insisted on wearing polo shirts and khaki pants, much to Bev's chagrin, but unlike Bev, Richie was redefining his understanding of sexy, where those clothes were concerned.

"Eddie, this is Frankie, Ben's friend from the gym," Bev piped up when it was clear that Richie was in no way going to introduce them, his tongue far too busy being glued to the roof of his mouth as he stared between the two men, trying and failing to suppress wild fantasies that included them, him, and thousand-thread-count Egyptian sheets.

That Eds would spend the whole time complaining about not being hypo-allergenic.

"Oh, hey man. I'm a friend of Ben and Bev's from middle school," Eddie shook his hand like the normal, functioning human he was, an indistinguishable expression on his face as his gaze flittered between Frankie and Richie for a moment.

Richie wanted to climb under the bar and stay there. Just give him another scotch and some peanuts and he'd be set for the night.

Frankie gave a short laugh as their hands dropped, "Wow, it's really cool that you guys have so many friends that you go that far back with, Bev. I barely talk to my college bros."

A snort escaped Eddie in a manner that suggested that he didn't intend for that to happen. A flush that Richie definitely did not find

downright adorable, spread across his cheeks.

“Ha, well—once a Loser, always a Loser, so...” Eddie trailed off, clearing his throat before gesturing at Bev.

“You’re tending bar, Marsh? That mean we’re all on doubles?”

“More like triples.”

Bev chuckled at Richie, winking conspiratorially before gesturing to something over his shoulder.

As if summoned by supernatural forces, (and sometimes Richie seriously questioned if that wasn’t actually the case) Ben and Stan joined them, Bill and Mike inexplicably in tow having appeared from who knows where.

“Frankie, meet the rest of The Losers Club - Stan, Bill and Mike. Guys, this is Frankie.”

A chorus of ‘hellos’ and ‘nice to meet yous’ accompanied by handshakes and bro-slaps to the back rang out, before both Mike and Bill leveled Richie with pointed looks, their gazes flickering between Eddie and Frankie with as much subtlety as frat boys let loose in a sorority house.

Yep, Richie was climbing under the bar any second now.

Bev interrupted his urge to sink to the floor when she started distributing the full shot glasses to each of the men, pouring two more for herself and, to Richie's surprise, Frankie.

"This is my own personal concoction," she smiled, raising her glass.

"So, a mix of gasoline and the tears of Trump Supporters?"

"Beep beep, Richie," they all groaned in unison as Bev turned to Frankie's look of bewilderment.

"Sorry, inside joke. We beep him when he gets too—"

"Richie," Eddie finished her sentence, taking up his shot and holding it out before Richie could exclaim his indignation.

"A toast to the best bartender this side of the Atlantic, and her architect fiancé who is doing alright for himself, I guess."

A ripple of laughter met those words, followed by large gulps and immediate splutters and gags as the glasses were slammed back down onto the bar with vigor.

"J-Jesus, Marsh," Mike wheezed in his best Bill impression, "you tryin'na kill us?"

Richie felt like he swallowed a battery as he coughed in agreement, his eyes jumping to where Eddie was doubled over, hand pressed to his chest.

Two out of the eight people present had already died one time too many, something which Richie would have pointed out with his usual gallows humor had they not had the company of Eddie's super jacked, better-dressed doppelgänger.

Somehow he could tell that the Losers heard his quip anyway.

It may have had something to do with the strange look Eddie had been shooting his way for several minutes now.

"Shake it off you babies," Bev merely replied before grabbing Ben's arm and pulling him towards their makeshift dance floor where the DJ was torturing them all with New Kids On The Block's ear-melting rendition of *Please Don't Go Girl*.

Stan, Bill and Mike turned away from the bar to regard them, chuckling at Ben's awkward shuffling that definitely did not constitute dancing.

"Huh, he may look the part, but he's no Magic Mike," Richie couldn't help but comment as he half-glanced at his friend over his shoulder before catching Eddie's eye.

“Shame. Handsome Hanscom would have been a great stage name.”

Richie barked out a laugh, startled when Frankie joined in, punching Eddie in the shoulder.

“Good one, man.”

A flicker of a wince passed over Eddie’s face but was quickly smothered by something else that Richie couldn’t quite name.

“So, Freddie, what do you do?”

Richie snatched back up his bourbon, because he definitely needed a drink for this.

“Oh I—it’s Frankie,” Frankie threw a quick glance at Richie before shrugging, “I own a gym.”

Eddie nodded with the vigor of a bobble-head, apparently forgetting to apologize for his mistake, “So we uh, have you to thank for Ben’s make-over then?”

“He’s not a nerdy teenage girl, Eds.”

“Shut up asshole, you know what I mean.”

“Yeah, Ben was an ugly duckling, now with Frankie’s guidance,” Richie clapped his empty hand down on Frankie’s shoulder, “Benny boy is a swan with abs of steel.”

Eddie stared at him before his eyes dropped to Richie’s hand.

Richie’s fingers seized up under the scrutiny, squeezing the (admittedly, impressive) muscle accidentally.

“I can’t take all the credit,” Frankie cut in, palm coming up to cover Richie’s lightly, “But I appreciate it, handsome.”

Richie’s heart skipped painfully as he swallowed around the lump in his throat.

He could feel Eddie’s eyes on him but forced himself not to break contact with Frankie, a man who was very obviously flirting with him, very obviously enjoying his attention and not beeping him or telling him to shut up or shirking his hand from him.

If anything, he had leaned further into him.

When did that happen?

“Can I get you another drink?” Frankie asked lowly, a small smile

gracing his face, “I promise it’ll go down easier than Bev’s.”

Don’t think about going down. Don’t think about going down. Don’t think about—

“Does it really count as ‘getting me a drink’ if they’re all free?”

Frankie laughed heartily, head thrown back, and it was then that Richie realized his hand was still on his shoulder. He didn’t remove it.

“Guess that means next time I’ll have to bring you somewhere where the drinks are ridiculously overpriced.”

Now that’s smooth, jackass. Take notes.

Richie could feel his cheeks heating up with a blush as he choked out, “Yeah. Guess so.”

As Frankie leaned forward to snatch up the bottle of bourbon Bev had left with them, Richie’s attention was brought back to the room around them, his eyes landing on the spot that had housed the other short, ridiculously-handsome brunet.

But Eddie was nowhere in sight.

Find my other Reddie fix-it [here](#). Would love to hear what you think of my second venture into this chaos :)

2. Tina T and NKOTB - A Love Story

Notes for the Chapter:

So this got way longer than I expected. *Insert Richie Tozier dick joke here*

♪ *Please don't go, girl. You would ruin my world. Tell me you'll stay.* ♪

It was too loud. Too cheesy. Far too cringey.

But, still. Richie couldn't begrudge Bev and Ben their moment, New Kids On The Block be damned.

"There's a story there," Frankie said lowly, right into his ear, his breath bouncing off his cheek and causing Richie to suppress a shudder.

It had been a while, a whole hot second since he had...dated. Not that what he ever did with guys really constituted as 'dating.' Being a closet case until very recently had made things tricky, that way. Whatever, point being, having a hot guy pressed up against him, whispering sweet nothings in his ear was doing all sorts of things to Richie.

It also didn't hurt that said hot guy happened to remind him a hell of a lot of his oldest, deepest crush.

Except, it kinda did.

All Richie could think about, when this perfectly nice, very attractive, super charming guy was flirting with him was how he was just that little bit too nice, too muscular, and not enough of a neurotic bastard for Richie to really invest in.

He shook his head, he had to get those thoughts out of his mind. He and Eddie were never going to happen. They were friends, just friends, and that was all they would ever be. Richie had to accept that, no matter how much it hurt.

“Yeah, those two losers were giant NKOTB fans when we were kids,” he forced himself to reply, shoving down the pang of pain in his chest as Eddie suddenly reappeared in his field of vision, speaking with Stan in his usual frantic manner, “They thought they hid it from us, but Benji was always a little obvious with his boy-band crush.”

And you were a little obvious with a whole different kinda crush.

♪ *Girl, you're my best friend. Girl, you're my love within. I just want you to know that I will always love you* ♪

Almost against his will, Richie's eyes found Eddie, again, easily picking him out in the crowd. Only this time, Eddie was no longer gesticulating at Stan, instead, he was staring right back at Richie, an enigmatic expression on his face.

Richie's heart ricocheted off this rib cage.

"Looks like we have an audience," Frankie murmured, causing Richie to glance back at him with a wince, "They're not the most subtle bunch, huh?"

Richie followed his eyeline to find that it wasn't just Eddie who was staring at them now, but also Stan, Bill and Mike, albeit slightly less obviously. Once Richie raised an eyebrow at them, each man quickly looked away, trying and failing to appear nonchalant.

All except Eddie, that was.

Their eyes met for a moment.

"Hey, wanna play a game? An ice-breaker, kinda thing?"

Richie dragged his gaze away from Eddie and his odd stare, back to Frankie, an uncomfortable feeling settling into his gut at those words.

Relax, Tozier. He's not gonna turn into a sadistic clown and rip your heart out.

"What kinda game?" He asked with a tilt of his head and a sip of his bourbon.

Frankie threw him a small smile.

“Truth or dare.”

Or maybe he will.

“And here I thought you were gonna say Seven Minutes In Heaven,” Richie plastered on a smirk to smother the grimace that definitely wanted to spread across his face.

Frankie threw his head back, a hearty laugh escaping him, “Yeah, that probably would have been more suave of me. But...the night’s still young.”

The promise strung between those words lit a fire in Richie’s gut.

Fuck it.

He leaned down, his arm brushing against Frankie’s as he smiled, “Alright. Truth or dare, Frankie boy?”

The brunet looked up at him, smirk a little lopsided.

“Truth.”

“Wuss.”

He rolled his eyes, “Just get on with it, Tozier.”

Richie floundered, “I barely know you, man. What truth do I ask a stranger?”

A cheeky glint crossed Frankie’s gaze, “Think of it as an opportunity to get to know me.” He leaned further into Richie’s space, their faces barely a half a foot apart as he tilted his head up at him.

“So...what would you ask someone on your first date?”

Fuck. Richie really ought to whip out some paper to take notes from this guy about being charming.

That’s not the only thing you wanna whip out, is it, Trashmouth?

The comedian managed to suppress a wince at the Eddie-voice that continued to haunt the back of his mind, instead focusing on the man in front of him.

“What did Ben tell you about me that got you interested?”

Frankie let out a snort of a laugh, “Who says I’m interested?”

Richie quirked an eyebrow before letting his eyes flicker down to their arms that were pressed against each other as they leaned on the bar, “You usually stand this close to guys you’re *not* interested in?”

The shorter man gave another chuckle, “Would be pretty creepy of me if I did, huh?”

Richie nodded, taking another sip of his drink, “Oh yeah, right up there with randos on the subway telling women to smile and Edward watching Bella while she slept.”

“Not a Twilight fan, then. Colour me shocked.”

“Yeah, I’m not too psyched about supernatural serial killers living among us.”

A look of befuddlement clouded Frankie’s face for a moment, no doubt questioning Richie’s far too sincere tone for such a stupid exchange.

He cleared his throat, “Oh well, in that case, let me put your mind at ease. I’ve never told a woman to smile and I’m not a blood-sucking, glittery teenager. But...I *am* interested,” he paused, smirk widening, “and Ben didn’t really need to tell me anything. I always thought you

were hot, even when your old stand-up was the shittiest ninety minutes since You, Me and Dupree.”

Richie snorted into the last of his drink, trying and failing not to notice when Eddie moved across the room, eyeing various appetizers with a look of veiled apprehension before shoving several into his mouth with reckless abandon.

A small smile spread across his face at the sight. Good ol’ Eddie Spaghetti had had several changes of heart since being impaled by a clown claw, bleeding to death and being raised from said death by an extraterrestrial reptile. Namely, finally embracing all the foods he had been convinced he was allergic to for the last forty years.

“Your turn - truth or dare?”

Richie’s attention snapped back to Frankie who was looking at him with a bemused expression, awaiting his response.

I know your secret. Your dirty little secret...

He swallowed around the lump in his throat, washing it down with the last drop of bourbon, slamming the glass harder on the bar than he intended.

“Uh, dare.”

“Why am I not surprised?”

“What can I say?” Richie plastered a fake smile on his face, his arms outstretched, “I’m a cliché.” He waited a beat, replaying the words in his head. “And a poet.”

“And a jackass, don’t forget that.”

He whipped around so fast his neck hurt.

“Pretty sure your mom taught you not to speak with your mouth full, Eds. I know she never did when I shoved my dic—ow!”

Eddie Kaspbrak punched him in the arm with his free hand, levelling him with one of his patented glares, chewing the remains of what Richie surmised had been one of those fancy pigs in blankets.

“Let me guess,” Eddie turned to Frankie, ignoring his friend, “he chose dare.”

Frankie nodded, eyes darting between them as Eddie scoffed, “Yeah, he always did that when we were kids, too. Pretty sure Trashmouth is allergic to the truth.”

Richie felt his cheeks burn.

“And looks like you’re *not* allergic to wheat, gluten, or whatever the fuck is in sausages, huh Eds?”

Don’t make a sausage joke. Don’t make a sausage joke. Don’t make a—

“Don’t call me Eds, dickwad.”

The glare was back, tenfold.

“Aww, but it’s so fun, Eddie Spaghetti.”

“Jesus, why can’t you—”

The clearing of a throat halted what was sure to have been a rant of Kaspbrak proportions.

Slowly, Eddie turned back to the third man, his cheeks noticeably redder.

Frankie, to his credit, merely smirked at him.

“Any ideas what his dare should be?”

And so, that was how Richie found himself snatching the mic from the DJ two minutes later, tapping it and clearing his throat.

Bev stopped dancing, throwing him a confused glance as she called out, "It's not time for the speeches yet, Rich."

Richie merely shrugged back at her, opening his mouth and singing (badly) along with the music:

"I'll be loving you forever, just as long as you want me to be, I'll be loving you forever, all this love's for you and me, yeah..."

Don't look at Eddie, stare at the ground. Don't look at Eddie, stare at the
—

A familiar laugh caused him to glance up, his gaze jumping to those dark eyes almost against his will.

Four-drink-Eddie was evil, Richie was steadily learning.

He watched as he and an equally-amused Frankie stood side by side, looking similar enough to pass for, maybe not twins, but certainly brothers and tried to calm his racing heart.

Eddie's gaze met his, his eyes alight with something that Richie couldn't quite place.

“I’ll be...loving you...yeah, it’s forev—”

“Thanks, Tozier, but don’t give up your day job,” Bev shouted over him as she wrenched the microphone from him with a flourish and pushed him back towards the bar with a strength that never failed to astound him.

Richie stumbled, limbs all akimbo.

“Whoa, I got ya!”

His breath caught at the back of his throat as strong hands gripped his forearms, steadying him. He looked down, his heart hammering against his rib cage.

“Thanks, Eds.”

Eddie stared up at him for a beat, that same bewildering expression on his face before nodding, letting Richie go and stepping back.

“I’m uh...I’m gonna go find the guy with the mozzarella sticks.”

Richie watched him go for a moment as he caught his breath, his eyes gluing to his back as he weaved in and out of the crowd until his small frame was engulfed.

“I think you need another drink.”

A fresh bourbon was held out in front of his face.

He eagerly accepted, shaking his head, “Your turn. Truth or dare.”

Frankie paused, scratching his chin, clearly battling with himself.

Finally, he shrugged, “Dare.”

Richie gave his best approximation of an evil laugh, his mind already whirling with possibilities.

Slowly, he started to smile.

“Uh oh, I don’t think I like that look.”

“Hey man, you’re the guy who suggested playing truth or dare with a comedian. You made your bed, now ya gotta lie in it.”

Frankie quirked an eyebrow at him, “Bit early to be thinking about bed, isn’t it, Tozier?”

Richie flushed, irritated with himself for walking into that one, but pressed on.

“I dare you to keep telling me jokes until I laugh.”

A look of absolute horror dawned on the other man's face in such a way that had it not immediately rendered his dare null and void, Richie would have laughed.

“Shit, are you serious? I gotta try and make you laugh? *You* . A professional *comedian* .”

Richie held his hands up in faux-innocence, “Hey, I don’t make the rules, dude. I mean, I was just gonna dare you to kiss me but don’t wanna be gross about consent. I’m not fucking Louis CK.”

Frankie hummed, “No, you’re definitely not...” he leaned in further, tilting his head up, until his and Richie’s mouths were barely an inch apart, “but, just for the record, I wouldn’t be opposed to a kis—”

“Shit, excuse me.”

Richie and Frankie were roughly shoved apart as Eddie shouldered through them, leaning over the bar to fumble behind it.

“Eds, what—”

“Bev’s asking for another one of her gasoline drinks,” Eddie cut across him without looking up, “You guys see where she left the bottle?”

Richie knew he was gaping like a fish, mouth hung open and eyes bugged out as he caught Frankie’s gaze over Eddie’s head.

“N-No, I didn’t see where she left it.”

Eddie turned then, looking up at him as if he wanted to say something, but didn’t know where to start. Instead, he merely snatched up Richie’s drink and downed the rest of it in one gulp.

“Hey! I was drinking that!”

Eddie let out a satisfied sigh as he slammed the glass down on the bar, wincing only slightly.

“God, one of Ben’s colleagues keeps trying to talk to me about scaffolding, it’s driving me nuts. You guys mind if I just hang here for a bit until he finds someone else to bore?”

Something in Frankie’s face told Richie that yes, he would mind that very much, but Richie couldn’t bring himself to say no to Eddie.

He never could.

“Sure, man. Frankie here was just gonna tell me a joke. He made the mistake of picking dare and now he has to keep going until he makes me laugh.”

Eddie scrunched up his nose, moving to stand next to Richie, their shoulders slightly brushing as they both regarded Frankie, who now looked incredibly uncomfortable.

“Uh, okay. A joke...joke...uh...okay. Why did the coffee file a police report?”

A beat of silence passed between the trio before Richie took pity on him.

“Why?”

“Because he got mugged.”

Richie allowed himself to smile. Eddie didn't seem to react at all.

Frankie grimaced, “Okay, tough crowd, tough crowd. I'll try again...” he cleared his throat, “How do you make holy water?”

Richie could practically hear Eddie rolling his eyes.

These jokes weren't the most...original.

Like you're one to talk Mr 'I don't write my own material.'

Still, Richie played ball.

"I don't know, how *do* you make holy water?"

"By boiling the hell outta it."

Richie allowed himself a larger smile as he felt Eddie shift his weight from foot to foot, arms now tightly folded.

"Really? Still nothing?" Frankie groaned a little, "I'll be here all night at this rate."

"Want a tip on how to make this asshole laugh?"

Both Frankie and Richie turned to Eddie who had piped up, looking more serious than the situation probably warranted. The former nodded as the latter merely gaped at his friend, truly no idea of what

he could possibly say next.

“Way I see it,” Eddie began with his usual genuflection, “you gotta appeal to Richie’s go-to, signature style. Which is the humor of a thirteen year old boy. So, mainly—”

“Sex jokes.”

“Sex jokes,” Eddie confirmed with a put upon frown.

Frankie narrowed his eyes, clearly wracking his brain. He drummed his fingers on the bar for a moment before smacking it, his eyes alright with triumph.

“Alright, I got one - What does the sign on an out-of-business brothel, say?”

He paused dramatically.

“Beat it. We’re closed.”

A small chuckle that was more of an exhale than a laugh escaped from Richie’s mouth, but it was clearly enough for Frankie, who was pointing at his face.

“Ha! There, I did it. Made the Trashmouth laugh. Your turn, Tozier - truth or dare.”

Richie gave a half glance to Eddie who snorted, murmuring, “Is there any point in asking? You know he’s just gonna pick—”

“Truth.”

He wasn’t sure what compelled him, really. Maybe it was always his innate desire to rile Eddie up, to prove him wrong, but the word was out of his mouth before he could think of the potential ramifications. Not that he hadn’t already over-analyzed the potential ramifications every sleepover from ‘85 to ‘89.

I know your secret...your dirty, little—

“Shit, you’re right, Truth is hard when you’re only getting to know someone,” Frankie cut across his internal crisis as he refilled their glasses, grabbing a new one for Eddie, who took it a bit absentmindedly, a look of bewilderment thrown Richie’s way.

Richie couldn’t blame him, really. In all their years playing this dumb game, Richie never chose truth, until he was dared to pick truth on his next turn - a nifty loophole that Stanley implemented at any given moment, until Richie dared him not to.

It was a whole thing.

“You’ve known him since kindergarten, right?” Frankie nudged Eddie with his elbow, “Any ideas what I should ask?”

Whatever expression marring Eddie’s face only deepened, he and Richie locked in some sort of unspoken staring contest.

“Uh—”

“Speech! Speech! Where are our best men?”

The clinking of a knife against a glass, along with Bev’s calling, interrupted Eddie before he could reply.

Richie shook his head, breaking whatever weird spell had befallen them and forced his feet to move, a sheepish grin thrown over his shoulder.

“I thought we agreed I’m your Man of Honour, Marsh? Sounds more official.”

He didn’t wait to see if Eddie was following him, instinctively knowing his was.

“Right, right, sorry everybody,” Bev rolled her eyes at the crowd, her smile mischievous as she put on her best Emcee voice, “Please

welcome to our makeshift stage, my Man of Honour and NKOTB butcherer - Richie Trashmouth Tozier!”

Richie pulled his least attractive face at her as he accepted the microphone, smirking into it over the chorus of cheers and applause from the small crowd.

“Thank you, Beverly, for that marvelous introduction - I knew I should’ve hired you as my crowd warmer.”

Chuckles met his words.

Eddie stopped at his side, a few feet to his right, being his usual distracting-self, but Richie forced himself to regard the two Losers standing behind him, Bev and Ben, picturesque and vibrant, wrapped around each other.

They enlarged Richie’s heart Grinch-style, not Coronary Heart Disease-style, they truly did. He honestly couldn’t be happier for them. But, seeing them with their new, happy, life and love also shot a pang of envy through him, every cell in his body yearning for what they had.

And the 5’9" bundle of untapped rage standing beside him didn’t really help said yearning problem.

Not that Eddie was his usual ball of unbridled brashness at that very moment. No. Instead, he looked as soft as Richie felt, all doe-eyes and

knowing smiles and honestly, it almost hurt Richie to look at him.

So he didn't.

With a gentle grin, he threw a wink at the happy couple before he spoke to the ground, breaking stage etiquette 101 - "A wise scholar once said, 'What's love got to do with it'—"

Another round of chuckles met his ear, but it was Eddie's fond remark of "Jesus Christ" that caused a pool of warmth to blossom in his stomach.

"—and I hate to disagree with the legendary Tina, but love has a lot to do with it, folks. Fuck tons. And those two Losers have it in spades."

He gestured at Ben and Bev who wore matching grins aimed his way.

"Even back in our shitty hometown, when we were prepubescent preteens just trying to make it through another day in Hicksville, Maine, surrounded by assholes straight from Deliverance, those two were beginning a love story for the ages. They just didn't know it yet."

He paused, his hand tightening a little on the microphone, threatening to shake.

"Ben's love for Beverly started like the best of 'em - a childhood crush. One made up of a badly-kept secret adoration for a cheesy boyband and slightly better haikus that led to a yearbook page being kept safe in a wallet for thirty years."

He waited a beat, casting his eyes to Ben, who was watching him with a look that, if Richie were a braver and more honest man, may have called *understanding* .

He swallowed the lump in his throat.

"Bev's love for Ben started as a friendship, one that grew over time into something more, even without either of them realising and was fiercely rekindled with a fire and depth that most of us could only dream of...and really, isn't that all we want in life?"

A stunned silence met his words.

Richie could relate, he wasn't quite sure where these words were coming from either. Maybe the five bourbons were helping. He deliberately hadn't written anything, opting to wing it, promising himself the full shebang on the Big Day. Now was just supposed to be some funny anecdotes and a cheers, and yet...

"Because love, despite what Ms Turner may want us to believe, is not a second-hand emotion, ladies and germs, trust me on that. I'd know..."

He trailed off, highly aware of Eddie's gaze burning a hole in the side of his face. He redirected his attention out to the rest of the Losers, his heart hammering as he found Stan, Bill and Mike watching him with matching looks of... *something* that made Richie feel seen in a way he hadn't in a long time.

Deflect, Tozier, deflect!

"Uh," he coughed, resisting the urge to rub the back of his neck, "but luckily, Ben and Bev don't have to worry about that. 'Cause like NKOTB would say, they're Hangin' Tough."

Dozens of groans and guffaws met those words that Richie heartily basked in as the tension broke, relief flooding his veins as he threw the small crowd a cheeky wink.

"Sorry, sorry, I couldn't help myself. But seriously," he waved his drink around with a flourish, "please raise your glasses to the sexiest couple in any room, Ben and Bev - congrats, Losers! To B-Squared!"

"To B-Squared!" The crowd echoed back, laughing amongst themselves and clinking their glasses with one another.

Richie almost jumped out of his skin when Eddie's glass tapped against his, the man in question now a lot closer to him, his pointed stare nigh on impossible to look away from.

"Thanks a lot, asshole," he mumbled quietly so the microphone

wouldn't pick him up, "I was meant to go first. How the hell am I supposed to follow your weird, mushy, crap?"

Eddie's face didn't seem to match his harsh words as he waved a hand at Richie, karate chopping the air. While his tone was agitated, his stance as animated as ever, his eyes were soft in a way that the comedian hadn't seen in what felt like forever.

A flush spread across Richie's cheeks. He hadn't meant to wax poetic, but he really was just incredibly happy for his friends. And as he looked around the room, seeing Stan and Eddie alive and well with the rest of the Losers, his mouth ran away with him. Just differently than usual.

"It's an engagement party, Eds. What was I supposed to do? Tell knock-knock jokes or—"

"Sex jokes?" Eddie cut across him, gaze flickering over to Frankie for half a second before snapping back.

Richie frowned at him, thrown a little by his odd tone.

As the cheers died down, the two friends watched as Ben snatched up a microphone to introduce Eddie who began muttering, "Shit, shit, why did I agree to this," under his breath.

Richie reached down to squeeze his shoulder, leaning in to whisper in his ear, "You got this, Eds. Just speak from the heart."

Eddie winced up at him, looking out of his depth.

Richie gave him another squeeze as their eyes met.

“What? You’ve never been in love?”

He didn’t know what compelled him to ask. He knew it was unfair of him, aware of Eddie’s history with his ex-wife - but something deep, ingrained in his very DNA, needed to know the answer.

“Have you?”

Richie’s heart seized in his chest as Eddie threw his own question back at him.

He looked away, focusing on something, anything, that wasn’t those large, brown eyes that had always haunted him, even when spooky magic kinda made him forget who they belonged to.

“Once.”

The word was quiet, barely audible over the bustling crowd, but Richie knew Eddie heard him when his shoulder tensed up under his fingers. He let his hand drop as if burned, clearing his throat and shoving the smaller man closer to Ben, just as he was jovially

announcing into the microphone:

“My Best Man - Eddie Kaspbrak!”

Richie couldn't see Eddie's face as he reached out and took the mic from Ben, in fact, he avoided looking at Eddie altogether, draining the last of his glass and staring down at the floor, wincing only a little when the microphone gave an ear-splitting screech before a throat was cleared into it.

“Shit, sorry, uh...hi. I'm Eddie. The Best Man. Obviously.”

A ripple of quiet laughter met that introduction, visibly relaxing Eddie.

Richie let his voice wash over him, but didn't focus too closely on the stilted, nervous words. He couldn't. Instead, he was too busy being distracted by the ringing in his ears, his heart rate alarmingly fast, his throat aching dry.

In his forty-one years, he had indeed only been in love once.

A love that had taken a twenty-odd-year hiatus, but was now back full-force, as crippling and inconvenient and as devastating as ever.

Richie had thought that coming out and letting himself date publicly instead of reducing himself to seedy hookups in bar restrooms and ill-

advised Skype sex would have helped him, at least a little, get over his pathetic adoration of Edward Fucking Kaspbrak. But nope, he was wrong.

Turned out, watching the love of your life die right in front of you, only to be then given a second chance to see them again, laugh with them again, tease and mock and badger them again, only strengthened any feelings you repressed since childhood.

Who knew?

“So, yeah, Ben and Bev...they taught me how love *should* be.”

Richie found himself tuning back into Eddie’s somewhat awkward speech, his ears perking up.

“It should be warm and fun and equal. It should be friendship, turned into preteen crushes turned into a deep, lasting commitment. It should be easy and hard and everything in between. It should be flirting and teasing and arguments over whose turn it is to do the dishes—not that these rich assholes have to worry about that.”

A chorus of laughter rippled through the room before Eddie took a deep breath, turning his head towards Richie for the first time since he began.

“And if you’re lucky, *really, really, lucky* , it could even span decades, be tried and tested and still win out over everything...”

Richie's eyes felt magnetically drawn to Eddie's. He barely suppressed a gasp at the myriad of emotion reflected back at him.

"So, to Ben and Bev," he continued, his eyes never faltering from Richie's as he raised his glass, "let's hope we all find a love like theirs someday. And when we do, we never let it go..."

"To Ben and Bev!" The crowd responded cheerfully, clinking their glasses together again, it a crescendo of positivity that the happy couple deserved.

Richie let out a breath he didn't realise he had been holding, breaking eye-contact with Eddie and forcing his feet to move, stumbling (for what felt like the tenth time) back over to the bar at a rapid pace.

Shit. Maybe I am more wasted than I thought.

That had to be the reason why he suddenly felt like his deepest, oldest crush had been trying to tell him something with that speech. Right? It was surely, complete madness, the daydream of a pathetic loser to read into the words as being more than what they were...

Right?

"Quite a speech," a voice greeted him as he leaned his elbows on the

counter behind him, watching as his friends, the rest of the Losers mingled with the party guests, some admiring Bev's ring and others chatting animatedly with Ben.

"Uh, yeah, thanks man," Richie answered Frankie, forcing his eyes away from Eddie who was the only one not engaging in conversation, instead staring down at his newly-acquired glass of champagne, a deep groove between his eyebrows.

Uh oh. That's his grumpy face.

Every face is his grumpy face.

...except whatever the fuck 'face' he had during that speech. What the shit was that?!

"Yeah, yours was good too. But I actually meant Eddie's," Frankie interrupted his inner-debate with his not-Eddie-voice, grabbing two champagne flutes from a passing waiter and handing one to Richie.

After a beat, the comedian shook himself, taking it gratefully and gulping down a generous amount with fervor.

"Y-Yeah, he did alright. Eds has a way of doubting himself and still always following through."

And he has the chest scar to prove it.

Frankie tilted his head at him, seemingly thinking over his words before settling on:

“Think he’ll want to join us again?”

Richie shrugged at him, taking another gulp, “Who knows about Captain Cockblock over there. I’ve no idea what’s gotten into—”

"I know what truth I wanna ask you."

He startled at the interruption, but quickly masked it with a cheeky smirk, leaning closer on one elbow, closing the distance between them as he replied lowly:

"Sure, lay it on me. My most embarrassing moment? A career low? My worst—"

"How long have you been in love with him?"

Notes for the Chapter:

Eddie’s POV next! Would love to know what you think so far :)

If you like it, feel free to check out my other Reddie fic.

3. Truth Or Dare Is A Dumb Game - An Essay By Edward Kaspbrak

Notes for the Chapter:

So this chapter is definitely longer than Richie's wang. Which, I know Stan would say doesn't say much, but in this case, I think it does because it nearly killed me. The chapter. Not Richie's wang.

Eddie Kaspbrak wanted it on record that he had always hated New Kids On The Block.

Always.

Even when Bev and Ben were not-so-subtly obsessed with them.

Probably especially then.

But even more so now.

♪ I need you, I need you, I guess I always will. Girl, you're my best friend. Girl, you're my love within, I just want you to know that I will always love you ♪

God, how could this get any worse?

“I can’t take all the credit,” Ben's friend was saying coyly to Richie in reply to something that Eddie almost immediately couldn’t remember, “But I appreciate it, handsome.”

Eddie watched as what's-his-name leaned further into Richie who had yet to take his hand off his shoulder.

This. This is how it could get worse.

His stomach churned uncomfortably as he watched Mickey (?) obviously flirt with Richie who was...not rebuffing his advances. Like, at all. Which...was unexpected, to say the least.

Don’t get Eddie wrong, he had been proud of Richie when he first came out. They had all been through a lot - trauma, death, resurrection, you name it, but when Richie had first sent that ‘*So, I’m gay lol*’ to the group chat three months post-Derry-debacle, Eddie had felt...well, he wasn’t sure, exactly.

But it was positive.

Sure, if it were him, would he had told this monumental thing to his oldest friends with one line of text in between memes and cat videos? No. But, this was Richie. And he was entitled to come out however he pleased.

Which, to the world, happened to be six months post-Derry-debacle in his Netflix special debut.

And that, Eddie had been really proud of him for.

It was crazy to think that that had been over six months ago now too.

God, had it really been over a year since everything in their lives changed irrevocably? Again?

Yeah, idiot. It's simple math.

And in that year, Richie came out, wrote his own material with Netflix adding a few more zeros to his bank account and quit smoking. Ben had proposed to recently-divorced Bev and she said yes, they already living together with their dog, Donnie. Stan had slowly but surely rebuilt his life after death, having told Patricia everything when he first came back, with varying results. Had convinced everyone and anyone who inquired that his death had been greatly exaggerated, or a mistake, or whatever genius excuse he happened to come up with at the time. Bill had started to write his best book yet, assuring the Losers that his ending was stellar, and he had begun couples counseling with Audra. Mike had travelled all over the U.S. seeing every sight he ever wanted to see before finally making it to Florida, settling in an amazing house with a beach-side view.

And Eddie had divorced Myra with a lot less fanfare than he had been expecting, minus some screaming matches and Rolex watches being held hostage. He finalized all his plans, left his ex-wife, his job and his home behind him to fly across the country to set up camp in the same apartment building as his childhood best friend because, oh

yeah, he had also realized something big.

He was once in love with Richie Tozier.

Back when he was a short-assed, short-fused hypochondriac.

Was?

Which, when he thought about it, was less of a realization and more just...remembering a particular fact.

Like when you forget where you parked your car only to remember you walked to work, just a thousand percent more terrifying and potentially life-altering.

Because once he remembered how he had felt all those years ago, it was very hard to forget. Especially when said first-crush lived just one floor above him now.

It had been a confusing year, to say the least.

One rife with cross-country moves and career-changes and constant questioning of whether he still had any residual feelings from when he would climb practically on top of Richie in the clubhouse hammock, just to feel his hand against his ankle.

Which brought Eddie back to why he hated the fucking NKOTB so much.

Them, and their sappy love songs, only serving as a reminder of what Eddie was missing out on because he couldn't pull himself together and get over his first love.

Because that was what Richie was to him.

His first love.

And honestly, when he thought back over the last thirty years - maybe his only love.

He remembered that too.

Just...a little too late.

"Can I get you another drink?" a suave voice broke through his mental breakdown as he watched gym-bunny press himself even tighter against Richie's side, "I promise it'll go down easier than Bev's."

Eddie was going to be sick.

“Does it really count as ‘getting me a drink’ if they’re all free?”

Yep. That was his cue to hurl.

The worst of it was, Richie sounded...pleased. Like he was enjoying the attention. Which, Eddie supposed, he probably was. He couldn't imagine what it must have felt like for Richie all these years, not allowing himself to experience flirting or dating or...love with anyone. To have to hide how he felt, who he wanted to be with. Not being able to openly feel attractive and attracted, both physically and emotionally to someone. To be alone, not embracing your wants and needs and—

Actually, maybe Eddie had a fair idea.

“Guess that means next time I'll have to bring you somewhere where the drinks are ridiculously overpriced.”

And yep. No. Eddie had had enough of this.

He quietly walked away without a backwards glance, not wanting to hear Richie's response.

Nausea began to churn in his gut as he made his way over to Stan, Bill and Mike who were watching Ben and Bev dance, snickering between themselves.

“Jesus, Ben really does have two left feet, doesn’t he?” Eddie remarked into his glass as he saddled up beside Stanley, watching as his hapless friend did an approximation of dancing, but came across as more of a marionette whose strings had been attached to a propeller.

“Two left feet, two left arms and crossed eyes,” Mike agreed with a chuckle, before jerking a head over his shoulder, “How’s our Casanova doing over there?”

Eddie did not want to look behind him, not in the slightest. He wanted to keep looking at the tragic attempt at dancing made by the groom and definitely not at whatever could be happening with Richie and his new...friend.

Still, despite himself, Eddie turned to regard the bar, seeing his friends do the same, albeit a little more covertly.

That bubble of nausea increased tenfold when it was revealed that Richie and gym-guy were standing even more closely together, speaking quietly, small smiles on their faces.

“Looks like he’s doing fine,” Bill piped up in a suggestive tone as Stan hummed in agreement.

“We may lose this bet after all.”

Eddie’s attention snapped away from Richie so fast he almost got a

crick in his neck.

“What bet?”

All three men looked a little sheepish as Stan shrugged, “We may have bet on whether Richie would get his act together and actually try dating.”

Eddie knew his face was doing something complicated.

“You bet—isn’t that like...” he threw his hands up in the air, “I don’t know, offensive or something? You know how hard it was for Richie to—”

“Oh no, it was Rich’s idea,” Bill cut across him, smiling over in the bar’s direction, “and it looks like he’s determined to win.”

Almost against his will, Eddie looked back over, his stomach clenching when he saw Richie smiling even wider, seemingly explaining something to his clearly captivated companion.

“This might be the first bet I’ll be happy to lose,” Mike murmured, warmth in his tone as both Stan and Bill made noises of agreement.

Eddie stayed silent.

Then, almost as if he somehow heard them, Richie looked up, his eyes locking onto Eddie's, his expression unreadable.

He should look away.

Why can't I look away?

Richie's eyes rose higher, clearly scanning the men behind Eddie, who all jumped into motion to try and make it seem like they hadn't just been spying on him.

Needless to say, they failed.

"Shit," Bill mumbled as Mike cleared his throat and Stan turned on his heel, rubbing the back of his neck.

Eddie though, he stayed rooted to the spot, looking back at Richie, as if expecting he'd make his way over to him.

He didn't.

Instead, whatever gym-head said, made him turn away, puzzled expression crossing his face.

Eddie continued to watch him for a beat before forcing himself to

follow Stanley, chucking back the rest of his drink in one large gulp.

“Why wasn’t I included in the bet?” he asked his friend quietly, staring down into the empty glass.

He could feel Stan’s gaze burning a hole into the side of his face.

“Did you *want* to be included in the bet?” Stan asked in a way that said he already knew the answer.

“No.”

“That’s why we didn’t ask you.”

Sometimes, Eddie felt that Stan knew him better than anyone.

With the exception of Richie.

“I’m starving,” he lied, still feeling nauseous, but needing an excuse to get away from his friend’s knowing look, “I’m gonna grab some appetizers.”

He forced himself across the room before any of the other men could protest, (not saying that they would, considering they were far too entertained by the shit-show Ben was putting on for a bemused

Beverly,) and made his way towards the first tray of food he saw, which happened to be mini enroladinhos.

Eddie knew Richie would give him shit for calling them that in his head - *they're fucking pigs in blankets*, Eds - but he didn't care. He had spent the last forty years denying himself life's simple pleasures because his mother, himself and later, his wife, convinced him that they were bad for him.

Foods, hobbies, men—

Nope. Not the time to go down that particular rabbit hole.

He distracted himself by practically shoving the hors d'oeuvres into his face, hoping that they would somehow quell the sick feeling that had marred his stomach ever since he walked in to find Richie being flirted with by a super-jacked and confident man that was very clearly into him.

What Eddie realised too late was that by following around various appetizer trays, he had unwittingly put himself back within earshot of Richie's conversation:

"Your turn - truth or dare?"

Eddie couldn't hear the response over the music and the sound of his own chewing, but nonetheless, his feet moved independently from his mind, propelling him toward the bar, just as Richie was exclaiming:

“What can I say? I’m a cliché...and a poet.”

“And a jackass, don’t forget that.”

The words were out of his mouth before he could stop them.

He had no intention of coming over here and butting in, but it seemed as if his legs and mouth had had other ideas. The look Richie threw him was almost comical, surprised and oddly...embarrassed? Eddie wasn’t sure. But it made his stomach swoop all the same.

But not with nausea. Something warmer, lighter, more pleasant.

Jesus, get a grip, Kaspbrak.

“Pretty sure your mom taught you not to speak with your mouth full, Eds. I know she never did when I shoved my dic—”

Eddie punched him in the shoulder, not in the mood for mom jokes and not caring about Richie’s indignant “ow!” Instead, he focused on throwing him one of his best glares, and chewing the rest of his snack before gearing himself up for what he had to say next.

“Let me guess,” he turned to muscle-Mickey, “he chose dare.”

The other man nodded, making Eddie scoff, “Yeah, he always did that when we were kids, too. Pretty sure Trashmouth is allergic to the truth.”

It had always annoyed thirteen-year-old Eddie, along with the rest of the Losers, when Richie categorically refused to pick truth during one of their sleepovers. It was only with time, and age, and understanding, that Eddie realised that there may have been a reason why Richie wasn't so forthcoming with the truth.

He had had something to hide.

Eddie remembered how truths usually went back then, all too well.

*Who do you have a crush on? Who do you want to ask to the dance?
Who was your first wet dream about?*

Yeah. Eddie could honestly say now that he didn't blame pre-teen Richie for always picking dare. Who knew how uncomfortable things could have accidentally been made for a closeted gay kid in the homophobic hills of Shitsville, Maine. Even amongst friends. It had been awkward enough for Eddie and he had been very much in denial the entire time.

You still are, shithead.

“And looks like you're not allergic to wheat, gluten, or whatever the fuck is in sausages, huh Eds?” Richie was saying, pulling Eddie from

his reverie, his cheeks noticeably rosy as he shifted his weight from foot to foot.

“Don’t call me Eds, dickwad.”

His retort was automatic, as it always was when it came to that nickname.

“Aww, but it’s so fun, Eddie Spaghetti.”

Eddie took a breath, preparing himself for their well-worn dance of snipes and traded insults, something that they seemed to have only perfected since childhood.

“Jesus, why can’t you—”

The clearing of a throat stopped his upcoming rant in its tracks.

It seemed they had an audience.

Right.

Richie’s...blind date.

Jesus.

Eddie forced himself to turn back to the stranger, knowing that his face was no doubt heating up under the scrutiny.

He had an idea what he and Richie must have looked like to outsiders, sometimes. Had heard teasing from The Losers about it all the time. Words like '*old married couple*' and '*pulling pigtails*' and '*just make out already*' being thrown around since they were kids.

It was all said in jest, of course.

Because everyone knew Eddie wasn't...

What?

Those remarks mostly came from Stan in more recent times, to be fair to the rest of The Losers. He seemed to not have the patience for Richie and Eddie's 'nonsense' having apparently had his fill as a boy, and refused to endure much more as an adult.

Eddie couldn't really say he blamed him.

Gym-Gary was watching him with an odd look on his face, his gaze flickering between him and Richie for a moment. Eddie didn't have time to glean what that could possibly mean before he was being asked: "Any ideas what his dare should be?"

Dare him to ignore you for the rest of the night.

Dare him to come get appetizers with me and make fun of this weird-ass group of people.

Dare him to talk to me, really talk to me about everything we've been tiptoeing around for the last year since I moved to L—

“Richie hates this song,” Eddie forced himself to speak, gesturing to the DJ booth, “But Bev loves it. So I think it’s only fitting, as the Man of Honour, that he sings it to her.”

He wished he could take a picture of Richie’s face right that second. It was almost as dumb-looking as the one he pulled when he got caught in the deadlights.

Don't think about that. Don't think about that. Don't think about—

“You little turd.”

Eddie grinned before shooing him, “Off you go, Wahlberg. Dazzle us with your dulcet tones.”

If looks could kill, Eddie would be dead all over again.

He could feel Charlie (?) watching them as Richie walked backwards through the crowd, cursing Eddie with his eyes all the way, before he snatched the microphone from the startled DJ.

Some sort of protest could be heard coming in the direction of Bev, but Richie ignored her, bringing the mic to his lips and singing along with the music.

“I’ll be loving you forever, just as long as you want me to be, I’ll be loving you forever, all this love’s for you and me, yeah...”

Eddie let out a laugh, even as his stomach clenched. The thing about Richie was...he wasn’t actually a bad singer. He just thought he was. And The Losers never let him think otherwise, lest he try incorporate musical numbers into his routine.

That was the last thing anyone needed.

His heart leapt into his throat as Richie’s eyes met his.

“He’s not bad,” Ollie (?) murmured from beside him, sounding at least a little impressed.

“He’s terrible,” Eddie replied automatically, but knew that his face was probably saying something a hell of a lot different as he couldn’t look away.

“I’ll be...loving you...yeah, it’s forev—”

“Thanks, Tozier, but don’t give up your day job,” Bev exclaimed to Eddie’s delight as she wrenched the microphone from Richie and shoved him back over towards the bar.

Eddie’s legs moved on their own accord, propelling him in Richie’s direction and catching him as he stumbled, clearly a little tipsy and feeling the force of Bev’s undeniable strength.

“Whoa, I got ya!”

His arms clasped Richie’s forearms tightly, steadying the taller man as he tipped forward.

“Thanks, Eds.”

Eddie’s heart hammered against his rib cage so hard that he didn’t think to argue the (not-so) dreaded nickname.

He looked up, catching something he couldn’t decipher in Richie’s warm, dark eyes.

It was then that he realised just how close they were standing, half on the makeshift dance floor, surrounded by laughing, happy couples.

Shit.

He forced himself to take a step back, nodding his head vigorously, letting his hands drop awkwardly to his sides.

“I’m uh...” he swallowed around the lump in his throat, “I’m gonna go find the guy with the mozzarella sticks.”

Without waiting for a response, he turned on his heel and power-walked through the crowd, towards the nearest tray of food.

It was then that he allowed himself to catch his breath. He hated how he was like around Richie, lately. These weird, charged, somethings between them had only gotten worse since he moved into his apartment building and spent practically every second of his spare time with him.

We’re making up for lost time, Eds , was Richie’s go-to whenever Eddie remarked that they were bordering on codependency.

God, he had missed him, though.

Which was funny, because up until 14 months ago, he had only known the name Richie Tozier for being that loud-mouth, crass, unfunny comedian with the obnoxious stand-up routine.

You still know him as that, Kaspbrak.

Only, that wasn't exactly true. Even if Eddie didn't want to admit it.

Over the last year, Eddie had done nothing but remember just exactly everything... *else* Richie was. Had always been.

Kind, considerate, affectionate...sure, it was all in his weird, awkward, off-beat way, but honestly, especially in those early months where he was nursing a serious injury in the midst of leaving his wife, Richie Tozier had been a goddamn godsend.

A life-saver.

Literally and figuratively.

But more importantly, he was Eddie's best friend.

Had been back when they were two annoying, brash, hyperactive preteens and was still now as annoying, brash, neurotic adults.

Which was precisely why Eddie most definitely did *not* still have a crush on Richie. He just didn't. Couldn't. Because life was finally...good again. Fun again. Whatever he had remembered feeling back when he was thirteen, was just that, a memory. Those feelings were childish and inconsequential. Born from proximity and limited options in their backward hometown.

There was no way that Eddie still felt like that. Like all he wanted in the world was Richie's attention. Like one smile aimed his way warmed his entire body. Like those nicknames that Richie liberally dished out, the ones that were meant to annoy him, actually made him feel...special.

Fuck, no.

Eddie was too old for that shi—

His heart nearly stopped as his eyes trailed back over to the bar to see Richie and Marty (?) standing closer than ever, barely a foot between them, the shorter man leaning up to Richie as if he was going to...

Before he knew it, Eddie had catapulted himself across the room, roughly shouldering between the two men, a lie easily tumbling from his lips:

“Bev’s asking for another one of her gasoline drinks. You guys see where she left the bottle?”

It wasn’t his best lie.

Probably wasn’t even in his top ten.

Yeah, the ones you tell yourself every day have claimed those spots, Eds.

His inner voice was beginning to sound more and more like Richie as the days wore on. Stupid proximity and all. Why did he think it was a good idea to move across the country and into his apartment building again?

Because you're still in love with him, asshole.

"N-No, I didn't see where she left it."

Eddie took a deep breath at the sound of Richie's actual voice, the one outside his head, his heart practically bursting out of his chest as he tried to calm his fraying nerves.

No. No way am I in love with that dumb dickwad. Sure, thirteen year old me may have been able to look past his grossness, his obnoxiousness, his Richie-ness, but I'm older, wiser, I know better now. I just love him as a friend, like I love all the Losers. That's it.

Then why did you just bulldoze your way through to stop him kissing someone then, huh?

He forced himself to turn, to do anything to ignore his know-it-all voice, feeling Richie's puzzled gaze all over him. He opened and closed his mouth in what was probably a better fish impression than Richie could ever manage, but no sound escaped. As he floundered, his eyes landed on a half-glass of bourbon on the bar, and before he

knew it, his hand had shot out, snapped it up and knocked it back in one gulp.

“Hey! I was drinking that!”

He took pleasure in the burn of alcohol in his throat and the indignation in Richie’s voice, slamming the glass back down.

“God, one of Ben’s colleagues keeps trying to talk to me about scaffolding, it’s driving me nuts. You guys mind if I just hang here for a bit until he finds someone else to bore?”

Eddie honestly didn’t know where these lies were coming from, and how they so easily came to him, but he couldn’t seem to stop himself. An itch had crawled beneath his skin, something which only flared up worse with every passing second that Richie spent in Ronnie’s (?) company.

God, cockblock much, Kaspbrak? Gym-head looks like wants to use you as a punching bag.

“Sure, man. Frankie here was just gonna tell me a joke. He made the mistake of picking dare and now he has to keep going until he makes me laugh.”

Eddie scrunched up his nose, ignoring his inner-Richie voice once again and moving to stand beside actual-Richie, barely suppressing a shudder when their shoulders brushed together.

He tried his best not to glare at Jamie - *you know well his name is Frankie, Eds. I literally just said it - fine, Frankie* , as he struggled to think of a joke.

“Uh, okay. A joke...joke...uh...okay. Why did the coffee file a police report?”

Annnnnd that was his cue to tune the fuck out.

Instead, he focussed on Richie, his body language. He seemed...not quite relaxed, but definitely a little more at ease than he had been a while ago. Seemed like the booze was definitely helping.

And the fact that Frankie is super charming and obviously 100% down to fuc—

Eddie’s perpetual frown deepened.

He felt like the world’s shittiest friend, he really did. He knew exactly how hard it had been for Richie post-coming out, unlearning decades of internalized homophobia, shame and guilt and accepting himself for who he was, openly, for the first time ever. And now, it seemed like he had a real chance at a relationship, a boyfriend, and instead of being supportive, like a proper friend should, he was filled with—

Anger. Jealousy. Hurt. All of the above?

—concern . He felt...protective over Richie, particularly when it came to this. He didn't want just any random stranger off the street being Richie's first proper boyfriend. That could lead to disaster. He wanted someone who actually deserved Richie and his (though he'd never admit it) soft heart. Someone who would treat him the way he should be treated. Someone who could give as good as he got. Someone who could go toe to toe with him on just about anything. Someone who could call him on his bullshit, raise him up when he fell down. Someone—

—*like you?*

No. Not me. I'm a 41-year-old divorcée with more neuroses than I've had hot meals and enough baggage to open my own luggage store. Richie Tozier...deserves better.

And that was the crux of it, really. What it actually came down to. What all the denial in the world couldn't make him forget.

He was most certainly in love with his best friend. Had been since he was a kid.

But that didn't mean he deserved him.

“Want a tip on how to make this asshole laugh?”

The words flew from his mouth without conscious thought.

But it made sense, the more that Eddie thought about it. It was probably the push he truly needed to get over this, to be an actual true friend, someone Richie deserved, if not in a romantic way.

He could help him get a boyfriend.

And this could be the first step in the right direction.

As always, he was highly aware of Richie's eyes on him, gaping at him in a way that told him the comedian was genuinely shocked, but he pushed on.

Richie had been his rock this last year. A true friend.

It was time for Eddie to return the favour.

"Way I see it," he began with a wave of his hand, "you gotta appeal to Richie's go-to, signature style. Which is the humor of a thirteen year old boy. So, mainly—"

"Sex jokes," Frankie interjected.

"Sex jokes," he echoed, a little thrown.

Eddie tuned out again, focusing on Frankie's body language as he tried to impress Richie. He didn't seem like that bad of a guy, loath he admit it. Wasn't bad looking either, if short and stocky was your type. Which it decidedly wasn't for Eddie. But, still, Frankie had potential for Richie's first boyfriend. And clearly Ben thought so too, otherwise he wouldn't have thrown together this haphazard blind date.

So...baby steps.

Are you talking about Richie, or yourself?

"Ha! There, I did it. Made the Trashmouth laugh," Frankie exclaimed after barely making Richie breathe, let alone laugh, "Your turn, Tozier - truth or dare."

Eddie's stomach clenched much in the same way it did back when they were kids and he found himself wondering, wanting, yearning for Richie to give him something, anything serious, sincere, that split second after the question was asked, feeling on the precipice of something that only a Truth could lead to. But it always lead to Dare.

Would this be it? Would this be the moment that Richie finally—

Eddie snorted, dismissing the thought immediately as his friend threw him a glance, "Is there any point in asking? You know he's just gonna pick—"

“Truth.”

Eddie’s heart leapt into his throat, barely believing the word had come out of Richie’s mouth.

After all this time, after dozens and dozens of games, some between the Losers, and others just one on one, spoken into a dark bedroom, lying beside each other and staring at the ceiling, Richie finally, finally said ‘truth.’

For some reason, it didn’t feel as satisfying as Eddie always thought it would be.

Frankie, for his part, also looked a little thrown as he mumbled, “Shit, you’re right, Truth is hard when you’re only getting to know someone.”

A few beats of silence passed between the trio where Eddie decidedly kept his gaze the furthest from Richie as possible without actually turning his back on him. Which probably didn’t help his reaction when Frankie nudged him on the elbow and ultimately asked:

“You’ve known him since kindergarten, right? Any ideas what I should ask?”

About a million, Frankie Last Name.

Did you ever have a crush on any boys in Derry?

If so, did I know them?

If so, were any of them me?

But somehow, Eddie didn't think that was a road that Frankie, or Richie, or he actually wanted to go down. He wracked his brain for something less...revealing. Or potentially devastating, in Eddie's case.

“Uh—”

“Speech! Speech! Where are our best men?”

Were Bev not an engaged woman and he almost-definitely gay and maybe in love with Richie, Eddie would have sprinted across the room and kissed her within an inch of her life for interrupting at that exact moment.

In a daze, he followed Richie, who was half-yelling something at Bev, humour in his tone as she began to introduce him to the crowd.

Eddie forced himself to stop at Richie's side as if on autopilot, something in the back of his mind telling him that it was a better

idea if he went first, but powerless to stop a geared up Richie. He always was.

Instead, he took that moment to really observe his friends, Bev and Ben, and it brought a smile to his face. They, just as much as the rest of the Losers, deserved to find love and Eddie honestly couldn't be happier for them. It warmed his heart, seeing just how content they were, excited about their new life together, surrounded by their loved ones.

He couldn't stop himself from looking to Richie then, feeling more so than ever, just how much he wanted the same for him. For someone to be for Richie who Ben was to Bev and for Richie to be for someone who Bev was to Ben.

You want to be the Bev, Eds, admit it.

“A wise scholar once said, ‘What’s love got to do with it’—”

Eddie groaned, muttering a slightly-too-loud “Jesus Christ” as he was spat from his reverie in the usual way - by his best friend’s nonsense.

Now that his attention was firmly back on Richie, Eddie found he couldn't look away. That soft smile that he always got when he was (once in a blue moon) being sincere, was like crack for Eddie in withdrawal.

The words of Richie’s speech themselves weren't fully sinking into

Eddie's ears, but the emotion behind them was. He was just as pleased for his friends, so happy for them that they had found each other after decades, abuse and loneliness.

"Ben's love for Beverly started like the best of 'em - a childhood crush."

Eddie's ears couldn't help but perk up a little at that. And the way in which Richie said it. As if...as if he spoke from experience.

Wishful thinking, Eds.

His eyes raked over Richie's face, watching as he glanced over to Ben, a gentle grin on his face as he regarded him and Bev.

Eddie was transfixed as Richie swallowed deeply, his stare falling to the floor, an odd expression clouding his features.

"Bev's love for Ben started as a friendship, one that grew over time into something more, even without either of them realising and was fiercely rekindled with a fire and depth that most of us could only dream of...and really, isn't that all we want in life?"

Eddie drew in a sharp breath, those words ringing in his ears. He couldn't believe, even in a moment like this, just how sincere Richie was being.

It was exhilarating.

"Because love, despite what Ms Turner may want us to believe, is not a second-hand emotion, ladies and germs, trust me on that. I'd know..."

Eddie stopped breathing.

He needed his inhaler. Damn it, why did he let Richie get rid of his inhaler?!

Because you're not asthmatic, dickweed.

What did Richie know? Had he been in love before? Was that what he was saying? Did he actually—

Doesn't mean it was ever with you, Narcissus.

"Uh...but luckily, Ben and Bev don't have to worry about that. 'Cause like NKOTB would say, they're Hangin' Tough."

Annnnnd there it is. The return of Trashmouth.

Eddie almost breathed a sigh of relief. This Richie he could deal with. He knew what he was getting with *this* Richie.

"Sorry, sorry, I couldn't help myself. But seriously," he waved his drink around, "please raise your glasses to the sexiest couple in any room, Ben and Bev - congrats, Losers! To B-Squared!"

Eddie echoed the cheers quickly, anxiety swirling in his gut for a plethora of reasons. But for now, he had to get through his imminent speech.

He stepped into Richie's space, muttering more lies about how sappy he found Richie's speech when in reality he was incredibly moved, but he couldn't ever tell him that.

They didn't...say those things to each other.

And isn't that the problem, Spaghettio?

Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Ben move to snatch up a microphone and he had a vivid flashback to that time in high school when he choked on stage during Debate, forgetting not only his argument, but the topic itself.

Killer clowns ain't got nothin' on stage fright.

"Shit, shit, why did I agree to this," he muttered frantically under his breath, fighting the urge to snap his eyes shut.

He felt rather than saw Richie move closer to him, nearly jumping out of his skin when his hand landed on his shoulder, squeezing it gently.

"You got this, Eds. Just speak from the heart."

The whispered words bounced off the shell of his ear, the breath causing goosebumps to flush all over Eddie's body.

Shit. Now would not be the time for an impromptu boner, Kaspbrak.

He could tell instantly that Richie misinterpreted his wince when he caught his eye and gave his shoulder another squeeze.

"What? You've never been in love?"

Eddie felt as if he spontaneously caught fire. He forced himself to maintain eye contact.

Once.

"Have you?" He said out loud.

Richie's eyes dropped.

"Once."

Ice plummeted into Eddie's stomach at that one word.

He knew, deep down in his soul, if such things existed, that there was no way, if Richie had only been in love once, that it could have possibly been with Eddie, especially not to this day. They were kids, they didn't truly know what love was. Couldn't have. Sure, first crush, first 'love' was one thing. In that childish, simple way.

But to only have been in love once in an entire, adult lifetime? And for that one love to be your childhood best friend, after all these years, after spending the majority apart?

Impossible.

Uh...didn't you just admit like ten minutes ago that I was probably your only love?

He mentally hushed his Richie-voice. Now was not the time for any more crises. He had a speech to make.

Richie's hand dropped from his shoulder. His stomach churned with nausea. And it wasn't from nerves or too many appetizers.

Don't think they helped though, to be fair.

“My Best Man - Eddie Kaspbrak!”

Fuck.

He reached out with a slightly shaking hand and took the mic from a beaming Ben, throwing him what he hoped was a smile but knew was probably more of a grimace. The microphone let its displeasure be known by giving a large screech. Eddie couldn't say he blamed it.

“Shit, sorry, uh...hi. I'm Eddie. The Best Man. Obviously.”

The knot in his stomach lessened minutely as people let out some chuckles at that.

You can do this, Kaspbrak. Just...speak from the heart.

He deliberately didn't look at Richie. That would be...too much. Instead, he turned to Ben and Bev.

"I'm so proud of you guys. You've...you've been through so much, to hell and back, and now, you get to be happy. I remember...when we were kids, both of you got so much shit, from everyone in our shitty town, but you never let it get to you. You both were always so...strong. Alone and together. And I think—I think you taught me a lot about love.”

He took a breath, resisting the urge to look at Richie, who didn't seem to be paying attention anyway.

He looked out to the crowd, eyes lingering on the rest of the Losers, about how they all made him feel, even after decades of separation. That warmth, that...closeness that he never seemed to replicate with any other relationships - romantic or platonic.

His wife included.

Eddie couldn't stop himself from looking at Richie, then. Ruminating on how similar, and yet different, that warmth and closeness always seemed with him.

Not the time, Eds.

"So, yeah, Ben and Bev...they taught me how love should be," he forced himself to continue, eyes safely averted.

"It should be warm and fun and equal. It should be friendship, turned into preteen crushes turned into a deep, lasting commitment. It should be easy and hard and everything in between. It should be flirting and teasing and arguments over whose turn it is to do the dishes—not that these rich assholes have to worry about that."

He basked in the ripple of laughter, letting it fuel him for what he

had to say next.

His heart ricocheted against his rib cage, his throat dry.

“And if you’re lucky, *really, really, lucky*, it could even span decades, be tried and tested and still win out over everything...”

He was drawn back to Richie like a moth to the flame, surprised to find him already looking back at him. Eddie’s eyes were saying too much, *everything*, he knew that. But he couldn’t look away if his life depended on it.

“So, to Ben and Bev,” he murmured, his gaze never faltering from Richie’s as he raised his glass, “let’s hope we all find a love like theirs someday. And when we do, we never let it go...”

Eddie didn’t hear the crowd respond over the rush in his ears, the thump, thump, thump of his erratic heartbeat. He held Richie’s stare for several moments, suppressing a wince as Richie eventually broke it, stumbling away from him with an indecipherable expression, back to the bar to where Frankie was waiting for him.

His heart sank, watching as the two men fell back into conversation, looking as close and at ease as ever.

Suddenly, even though he was surrounded by his friends, in the epicentre of warmth and positivity - he felt cold.

Alone.

Then again, Eds. You know what they say, if you love someone, let them go...

Notes for the Chapter:

This chapter was my own personal Neibolt, my dudes. Would love to hear your thoughts :)

4. Dancing With The Stars Isn't All That Bad, Actually - A Joint Study By Richard Tozier and Edward Kaspbrak

Notes for the Chapter:

Sorry, this just keeps running away from me. But the next chapter is the last. Probably. I'm deliriously sick with the flu right now so who knows lol. Enjoy!

"How long have you been in love with him?"

Richie's heartbeat thundered in his ears as his mouth fell open, gaping like a tipsy fish for several long moments while Frankie waited nonchalantly, as if he hadn't just flipped Richie's entire world upside down, Fresh-Prince-Style.

"My actual first name is James."

Richie frowned as he was pulled from his panicked daze.

"What?"

Frankie shrugged, swirling his glass in hand, "Just thought I should offer up another truth, considering mine made you short-circuit."

Richie flushed, still unable to look him in the eye, but equally unable to look across the room where his friends still stood. But despite that, he could tell that Eddie had disappeared. He tried not to anxiously scan the room for him and instead, the floor was now the most

interesting sight Richie had ever seen.

“I...” whatever noise he had been attempting to make died in his throat.

He dredged his glass.

From the corner of his eye, he saw Frankie shuffle his weight from foot to foot.

“Hey man, look, I’m sorry. That—That was uncalled for. I didn’t mean to make you uncomfortable or—”

“Why do you go by ‘Frankie’ if your real name is James?” Richie cut across him, his stomach practically churning butter as his heart rate only continued to climb.

Frankie looked a little thrown by the question which honestly, all things considered, Richie only thought was fair.

“Uh,” he murmured, giving a one-shouldered shrug, “My dad’s name is also James, so when I was younger, I started using my middle name, Francis, so we could be told apart. That eventually became ‘Frankie.’”

It wasn’t an interesting story, not in the slightest, but Richie nodded vigorously as if it was the most intriguing thing he had ever heard.

Hello avoidance, my old friend.

That's not how that song goes.

Suddenly, Richie couldn't bear to stand there any longer.

"I, uh, gotta take a leak. I've had like, I dunno, fifteen bourbons," he snorted, depositing his empty glass on the bar to join the others before taking a step away.

"Yeah, sure man," Frankie called after him, not sounding sure at all.

Whatever else he had to say was lost under the ringing in Richie's ears and the beginning of what sounded like Bev's ultra specific '90s playlist.

He weaved his way in and out of the party guests, stumbling out of the living room and down the hall of the expansive house, trying to level his labored breathing.

"Keep it together, Tozier," he muttered under his breath as he turned a corner, "just keep it toget—Ow!"

"Fuck!"

Richie groaned as he roughly collided with a solid force, his stomach leaping into his throat as he instantly recognised its owner.

“Jesus, Rich, you need a new prescription on those hipster glasses or something?” Eddie grumbled as they both righted themselves, Eddie bending down to pick up the phone that had flown out of his hand on impact.

“Uh, sorry Eds,” Richie murmured, watching him with probably a dumb expression on his face, but ever since Frankie’s little truth bomb, his brain just didn’t seem to want to cooperate.

Eddie just gave his patented eye roll that Richie most definitely did not find endearing in response, pocketing his phone and clearing his throat.

“Just got off the phone with our Super.”

A ripple of concern shot through Richie.

“Shit, Dan? Is everything okay? What’s—”

“Yeah, yeah, everything’s fine,” Eddie waved off his worries with a hand, “Mrs Hernandez just accidentally locked herself out of her apartment. Locksmith won’t be able to come out until tomorrow so he’s putting her up in his guest room.”

Relief flooded Richie's veins. Although, he did hate the idea of Rosalita being locked out. Typical that her spare key was currently attached to the keys in his pocket.

Speaking of...

"Wait, why did Dan call you and not me? I—"

"He said he called you three times, actually," Eddie cut across him, his tone a little off as he no longer looked directly at Richie, "but when he couldn't get through, he called me. He, uh...assumed I was with you, so..."

He trailed off with a one-shouldered shrug.

Richie saw his point. Over the last year, and particularly since Eddie had moved into his apartment building, they had been spending a lot of time together, Eddie even staying most of his nights in Richie's guest bedroom despite living only one floor away.

Warmth spread in Richie's stomach as he recalled how only two nights before, his friend had fallen asleep on his couch mid-way through their '80s movie marathon, just as Richie was perfecting his stellar Rick Moranis impression.

His head had used Richie's shoulder as a pillow from the second act

of *Honey, I Shrunk The Kids* and he had been far too tired to turn down Richie's guest room when he finally awoke an hour later, looking adorably grumpy and sleep-rumpled.

God, Richie *loved* him.

So much so, complete strangers were apparently starting to notice.

Shit.

"Keep saying you should just give up the ghost and live with me already, Eds. The whole building treats us like one entity now anyway."

The words were out of his mouth before he could stop them.

Eddie's already large, dark eyes bugged out, causing Richie's stomach to swoop in its usual way, a mix of fondness and irritation. The irritation aimed directly at himself and his ability to have exactly zero chill wherever Edward Kaspbrak was concerned.

Double shit.

"What and infringe on you and your new boyfriend? Pass."

Eddie's tone was tight, his gaze still averted, which was a shame in Richie's opinion as he knew that whatever expression he was currently wearing on his own face was downright comical.

"Boyfriend? W-What boyfriend?"

Those eyes found his once more.

"Uh, Freddie? Frankie? Whatever. Looked like...you guys were hitting it off so I uh...assume you'll be seeing more of each other. Would be kinda awkward if—" he cleared his throat, gaze bouncing away, "If I was just hanging out at your place while you guys, uh, you know..."

Richie desperately wanted to put Eddie and himself out of the joint misery of that sentence, he really did. But his brain was still malfunctioning. The blush high on Eddie's cheeks certainly didn't help matters either.

"Anyway, think I'm gonna call it a night," Eddie managed to continue eventually, stepping around Richie, his balance a little off centre in a way that suggested he had had one or two more glasses of champagne, "Hopefully Bev—"

"What makes you think I'm into him?"

Richie just couldn't leave well enough alone. This was not news. But it also wasn't ideal under any circumstances, but especially not now when he was knee deep in bourbon and reeling from a cute stranger

calling him out on his decades old crush that may not have been as secret as he previously thought.

Eddie whirled around and pulled his “Don’t be stupid, stupid,” face.

“C’mon, Rich,” he scoffed with a wave of his hand, “You’re practically dry-humping against the bar. What would you call it?”

A spark of annoyance flooded Richie’s veins at those words.

“We weren’t... *Jesus Eddie* , we were just talking. Didn’t think that constituted as—”

Eddie snorted, “Just talking? That what the kids call it these days? C’mon, Tozier. You’ve been pressed up against him all night. You’ve barely taken your eyes off him. You asked me how I know you’re into him? It’s simple,” he paused, his whole body oddly tense, “it’s ‘cause I have functioning eyes, man.”

Oh, so now he decides to be observant.

Richie took a step closer to him, that annoyance only heightening.

“Huh. And did those functioning eyes happen to notice anything else about dear Frankie, by any chance?”

He knew he was pushing his luck. Pushing harder than a mom in labour with octuplets, but in that moment, he didn't care. Richie was just...so tired. Turned out constantly shoving down your feelings and drowning them in denial for thirty years was exhausting.

Who knew?

That line between his eyebrows that Eddie always got when he was confused made a predictable appearance.

“Uh, that he's jacked as shit? Could probably bench press you? Not that that would be hard, you are mostly made of ramen and booze.”

Thing was, Richie believed that Eddie genuinely didn't see how he and Frankie obviously looked alike. It still didn't stop him from being baffled at how Eddie had never realised that no matter what way he may have been acting with Frankie earlier, it came nowhere close to how he acted around Eddie every single second of every day. Frankie more or less told him five minutes ago just how obviously lovesick he was, for fuck's sake.

'Functioning eyes' my ass.

“Exactly right, Eduardo. That dude is almost as jacked as the Old Spice guy. And you know how much I love him.”

Richie may be tired, but he was also, deep down, fundamentally a coward. So, back to good ol' deflection it was.

“Yeah well,” Eddie gave his signature karate-chop wave, “I’m sure you’ll grow to love Freddie—”

“Frankie.”

“Right.”

The two men stared at one another, stood barely a foot apart in Ben and Beverly’s hallway that was lined with dozens and dozens of pictures, mostly those recovered from their childhoods and happier times since passed. Richie and Eddie were even in a fair few of them, bespectacled and lanky and fanny-packed and short, respectively, both nearly always turned to each other in various states of ire.

Not much had changed, really.

Fanny pack notwithstanding.

Out of the corner of his eye, one photograph in particular nabbed Richie’s attention.

His legs carried him over the short distance, a small smile beginning to creep onto his face as he stared at their younger selves.

It was one of the rare pictures where he and Eddie weren’t

antagonizing one another. There were no bunny ears, or poking sides, or noogies, or wet willies, or pulling faces. Instead, it was just he and Eddie, caught in a moment, not even looking at the camera as they stood close together, at the bank of the quarry.

Eddie, in his signature red shorts that used to drive Richie crazy, was clearly doing something, looking down at his watch maybe, it was hard to tell from the distance, but it was young Richie, clad in his usual graphic tee get-up that current Richie (he refused to think of himself as old Richie, no matter how true it may be) found himself watching. Because young Richie was watching young Eddie, an expression on his face that current Richie knew all too well. One that he wore pretty much all the time around Eddie, back in childhood and still now, thirty years later.

Fondness. Affection. Love...

God, he really was obvious as fuck.

He wondered if Ben and Bev knew, could either see it back then, or during Richie's dead-Eddie-breakdown, or now, whenever they passed this picture. What about the rest of the Losers? Surely, whoever had taken this picture, saw what he did now, written all over young Richie's face?

"I don't remember that being taken."

Eddie's voice was quiet beside him, almost as if he was reluctant to break Richie from his reverie.

“I don’t either,” Richie murmured, eyes still glued to it, a feeling settling into his gut that maybe they were never meant to know the picture had been taken at all.

He felt Eddie step closer.

“God, we were so...” he trailed off, letting the half-sentence hang between them.

“Yeah...” Richie agreed to everything and anything that could have possibly ended said sentence.

Short? Young? Annoying? All of the above?

The two men stood side by side, staring at the photograph of their younger selves for a few moments more, nothing but shared breaths passing between them as the loud music coming from down the hall continued to thump in the background.

It was the quietest Richie had been in a long, long time.

“Seems like you’re gonna win the bet.”

Richie frowned as those words sunk in, finally turning to regard his lifelong friend, and unfortunately for everyone, love of his life.

“What bet?”

He knew what bet, of course. The bet had been his idea. Mainly as a way to get the guys, mostly Stan, to shut the fuck up about him not “getting out there” or “playing the field” or “goin’ fishing in the giant gay sea” post-coming-out. So, without really thinking of the consequences, Richie bet them all that he could sample the delights the world outside the closet had to offer. That he could and would allow himself to flirt and to date someone openly, for the first time in his life.

Which ultimately led to Ben having the “best idea ever”, apparently. Because he had a friend at his gym that he *knew* Richie would “hit it off” with.

He just neglected to note the little detail of said gym friend being a ringer for their favourite ex-risk analyst. Or, maybe he didn’t. Maybe ol’ Ben was more wily than Richie gave him credit for and connected the dots on Richie’s ultra-specific taste in men.

Or rather, “man.”

“—so I don’t think they care they’re out money,” Eddie was saying when Richie managed to tune back in.

“It’s just drinks. Nothing has happened between us,” he piped up, his voice softer than he’d like.

“But he’d like it to,” Eddie shrugged, eyes back on the photo, “and you too...right?”

Richie almost swallowed his tongue.

He couldn’t have possibly answered that question, even if he wanted to.

Eddie seemed to take his silence as an answer however as he just nodded to himself, turning away from the picture and Richie and beginning to walk back down the corridor, calling over his shoulder:

“Then go for it, Rich. You...deserve to be happy.”

Richie watched him go, stomach sinking into his shoes.

He wasn’t sure if he deserved to be happy. But there was one thing he *was* pretty sure of these last few decades, something that was only reinforced even stronger in the last fourteen months.

He would never find it with anyone that wasn’t Eddie Kaspbrak.

Triple shit.

~*~

Eddie weaved his way back into the living room as fast as he could, putting as much distance between him and Richie as possible, that old picture burned into his brain like a taunting brand. He cringed as he replayed the last ten minutes in his head. God, he hadn't meant to come across so fucking... *jealous* . Did he seriously have to say the words "dry-humping against the bar?"

What the actual fuck is wrong with me?! So much for being a supportive friend. Jesus.

He grimaced as he was suddenly assaulted by terrible '90s music, definitely European-sounding, possibly that Irish pop band with the fiddles and random talking. He thumbed through his phone, going back over the multiple messages from Dan inquiring about Richie's whereabouts and was so distracted that he didn't notice when someone saddled up beside him.

"It was a good speech, Eddie."

Eddie's eyes shot up from his phone to meet Stanley's.

"Oh, thanks Stan. I'm uh...not much of a public speaker."

Stan tilted his head concedingly, before gesturing to the phone.

“You get through to your Super?”

Eddie exited out of the text from Dan and nodded, “Yeah, I did. One of our neighbours got locked out of her apartment, so he just wanted to let Richie know. He and Mrs Hernandez are close.”

Something clouded Stan’s face for a moment.

“Yeah, he told me how she helped him out of a jam when he was a broke college dropout. Something about her paella keeping him alive,” he gave a small smile, sipping his drink.

Eddie couldn’t help but smile back, recalling the stories that Richie had told him about Rosalita Hernandez.

Over the last year, he had been getting more and more glimpses into the life of Richie Tozier that he had missed out on for over twenty years. His ill-fated college years, his first attempt on the comedy circuit when he was still trying out his own material and failing miserably, his humour just that too weird and crass and before its time to really work for him yet. His couch-surfing and borderline homelessness when he dropped out of UCLA to pursue comedy full-time, and his befriending of a lonely widow whose only living family had moved out of state years ago.

Mrs Hernandez had really become a second mom to Richie, and Richie the child she never got to have. She had lived alone in a tiny, one bedroom apartment in downtown Los Angeles, and when she bumped into late-twenties Richie in a bodega one morning, the two got talking about life. It didn’t take long for them to strike up a

friendship, Richie helping her carry her groceries home and she insisting he stay for lunch as he was “much too skinny, dios mio.”

That soon lead to weekly breakfasts and errands ran and furniture moving and anything else Rosalita needed help with; Richie did it all. In return, she kept him fed, slipped an extra twenty dollars into the back of his wallet that she thought he didn't know about, and kept his spirits up when his soul was damn-near broken by the biz. And life. And depression.

When Richie made his first half-mill, he bought Rosalita an apartment. A nice one, with two large bedrooms, one and a half bathrooms, and a terrace.

When he made his first mill, he bought the entire building.

Over the next while, Richie met more people down on their luck, like Dan, an Army veteran in need of a break, and offered him the job of building superintendent as Richie's career was really beginning to take off and he didn't have time for daily management anymore. It didn't take long for eleven of the twelve apartments to become occupied, either by the old tenants, or brand new ones that Dan and Richie realised could do with the break they both got.

The twelfth apartment lay vacant until the day Eddie showed up on Richie's doorstep with the announcement that he had left his wife. For good. D-I-V-O-R-C-E, as Dolly would say. And Richie did say, or rather sing, obnoxiously for several minutes until Eddie shoved him so hard he tripped over Eddie's many, many suitcases.

They had him moved in downstairs in one afternoon.

With Richie technically being his landlord - that still sounded foreign to Eddie's ears - Eddie didn't have to immediately worry about rent, which had been a good thing, considering he had also left his job as well as his wife. So he was no longer working 9-5 - although that didn't stop Richie from singing that too - and could properly focus on continuing to heal from the gigantic wound in his chest.

Magic space turtles could only do so much. And apparently that didn't cover helping with phantom pain, real pain and PTSD.

Which ultimately led to Eddie hanging around Richie's apartment for hours on end, helping (critiquing) him with his new material and practically becoming his housekeeper, which was something that worked for both of them. Eddie got to work out his issues in his usual way, through cleaning, and Richie got to indulge himself in his favourite pastime, annoying Eddie. It was a win-win.

The day Eddie found out that nobody in the building technically paid Richie rent, he almost passed out. As a man who had been paying rent for over half his life, only to then suffer through the agony of a mortgage, the idea of having a home, pretty-much expense free, was unfathomable. And also made him respect Richie more than he already did. Not that he'd ever tell him that.

The neighbours all paid whatever they could into the building maintenance jar, which was actually a real-life mason jar that Eddie frankly thought was an insane way to manage money, but it seemed to work for them. So, when he eventually found himself a job at a car service, he began contributing what he could.

Life was good.

Had been great.

Until Eddie's pesky feelings started to cause problems.

"Earth to Eddie, you in there?"

A hand waved in front of his face, effectively snapping him from his reverie.

"What—yeah sorry, zoned out for a sec. Wonder what the hell Bev put in those drinks," he rambled, feeling his cheeks heat up in a blush as Stan leveled him with a disbelieving stare.

"Uh huh," his friend murmured in a tone even less believing, "So did Richie have anything to say about lover boy over there?"

Bile rose up Eddie's throat.

"Uh I—we—didn't really talk about—"

"Cause we really don't mind paying up. We just went along with the

bet to give Richie that final push, you know? He's..." Stan paused, an odd expression crossing his face as he stepped a little closer to Eddie, looking at him in a way that suggested he was trying to silently communicate something, "He's brave, always was. It's just sometimes he needs that extra little nudge."

Eddie's stomach tied itself in knots.

Something in Stan's face assured him that they were not only talking about Richie.

"Any advice on how... *he* can be brave?"

His throat was drier than any desert as he forced the words out, leaning a little further into Stanley, keeping his voice low.

Stan tilted his head, knowing look in his eyes, "We died and came back to life, Eddie. If now's not the time to be brave, when is?"

Eddie swallowed the tennis-ball-size lump in his throat. Guess they really were talking about this then.

Told ya Stan knew ya better than anyone. Richie excluded.

"Last time I was brave, I was impaled by a demon clown claw—" his eyes darted around him suddenly, as if just remembering where they were, "I mean...car accident?"

Stan rolled his eyes, “Nice save, buddy. Besides, I don’t think anyone can hear us over this noise.”

He had a point. They had gotten onto the jig part of the song now, everyone around them jumping about the place doing a bad attempt at Irish dancing. It was almost endearing in that semi-drunk way.

“What are you waiting for, Eddie?”

That question tore his eyes away from Bev and Mike who were linking arms and kicking their legs higher than Michael Flatley.

“What...what are we talking about here exactly, Stanley?”

It wasn’t his best deflection, but his brain wasn’t exactly being his friend right now.

“Don’t play dumb, it doesn’t suit you, Edward.”

Before Eddie could think of a response, Richie bounded back into the room, legs kicking dangerously high, reminiscent of Jim Carrey in his particularly hyperactive days as he saddled up on Bev’s other side and linked arms with her, the duo now a trio, bouncing back and forth in a seven step formation like puppets on a string.

Never let it be said that Bev was too cool to look like an absolute tool in front of her friends and business associates.

“If you could see your face right now, Kaspbrak, you’d know exactly what we were talking about.”

Eddie dragged his eyes away from Richie, who had his head thrown back in a hearty laugh, his cheeks a deep crimson, most likely from alcohol as they all knew he didn’t feel embarrassment on the scale of a normal human being.

“I don’t know what you’re—”

“You look at him like he hung the moon, Eddie. You always have.”

Eddie’s heart damn near stopped for the second time in his life.

He knew his jaw had dropped open, was gaping like an idiotic fish, but he couldn’t help it. Stan, in the meantime, merely folded his arms, looking even more resolute.

“Sorry, Ed. I...I know it’s probably not my place. I know I...I wasn’t around when everything was going down and you guys had all the shit to deal with as well as getting to know each other all over again but—ever since I have been back, I’ve seen a change in you. Especially since you moved to L.A. and that...that made me remember some stuff. From when we were kids. Mostly...how you and Richie were around each other. The pigtail-pulling and hammock

hogging and, well, probably childish flirting if we're being honest, right?"

Eddie continued to gape at him, his brain to mouth function having ceased existing.

"And I...I don't think much has changed, do you? You guys are the same you've always been, just older and even more stubborn. Which I didn't actually think was possible, so that's something," Stan paused, as if catching himself, something sheepish passing over his features as his eyes caught Eddie's again.

"You can tell me to fuck off and mind my own business if you want. That's up to you. But I just...I just couldn't watch the same thing that happened in...in Derry, happen again. It's not 1989, and we're not in that crappy town anymore. You...you and Richie could actually be happy now. You have that chance. If you just *talked to each other*."

There was a beat where the two oldest friends looked at one another, open and honest in probably the most profound way in their entire lives.

"What makes you think he feels the same about me?"

Eddie was done denying it. Knew that there was no point protesting against anything Stan had just said.

"What makes you think he doesn't?"

It was a non-answer, they both knew that. Because at the end of the day, Stan couldn't be the one to tell him either what he desperately wanted to hear, or the absolutely last thing he would ever want to hear.

There was only one person in this room who could do that.

The same person who was now apparently being led away from Bev and into the arms of his handsome blind date as the upbeat music faded into something slower, more romantic.

Eddie stared at the two men, his heart hammering against his rib cage as Richie, who was clearly a little self-conscious, glanced around them, but seemed to relax a little when he found no judging stares aimed their way.

He took Frankie's hand and began swaying in a surprisingly graceful way that had Eddie remembering that Richie and Bev had practiced how to slow dance down in the clubhouse, neither noticing Eddie's stony stare or Ben's pining glance.

"Can I have this dance?"

A voice broke through Eddie's trip down memory lane.

He exchanged one last look with Stan before turning to see Bev

smiling at him, something enigmatic on her flushed but no less beautiful face.

“Of course,” he replied without pause, despite knowing he wasn’t the best dancer in the world, but comforted by the knowledge that he was nowhere near as bad as Ben.

♪ *Saying I love you, is not the words I want to hear from you...* ♪

Eddie barely suppressed a full-bodied wince.

“Really, Bev? *More Than Words* ?” He murmured as one hand fell to her waist and the other gently clasped her hand, they beginning to sway back and forth.

She snorted in her most unfeminine way that Eddie always secretly found endearing.

“It’s cheesy ‘90s pop, Eddie. Can’t have a playlist without *Extreme* . It’s the law.”

He merely rolled his eyes, laughing a little as his gaze caught on Ben, who was attempting a four-man-sway of his own, his arms around the shoulders of Mike and Bill respectively, as Stan stood close to them, watching dubiously.

“How much has Ben had to drink?” Eddie chuckled, as he twirled

Bev, who let out a loud cackle.

“Oh, he’s had a lot. But thankfully, he’s a happy and hilarious drunk. The best kind.”

The warmth in her tone was laced with something like experience, like perhaps she knew other types of drunks who were anything but happy or hilarious and this was a pleasant turn for her.

Just another thing she deserved to have in her new life.

Eddie dared to dip her a little, barely half-way really, but it was enough to emit another booming laugh from her, something that warmed his heart.

“And I thought Richie was a good dancer,” she giggled, her eyes twinkling as they met his, “You’ve been holding out on me, Kaspbrak.”

He gave her a soft smile before his attention was drawn again to Richie, who seemed to have equally been drawn over to them, no doubt by Bev’s laugh.

Their eyes met over the heads of their respective dance partners. It was as if all of the air had been sucked out of the room. Richie always had this knack for making Eddie feel *seen* in a way nobody else had. And with his giant glasses, that was only extra impressive. Now, seemed no different, his gaze like a full-body x-ray.

“I remember when he was always trying to get you to dance with him in the clubhouse,” Bev’s voice pulled him away from Richie.

Eddie frowned at her, “What? No he wasn’t. He always danced with you. Joked that you should join some sort of ballroom dance class, so he could, and I quote: ‘pick up chicks because we all know what they say about *good dancers* .’”

Bev rolled her eyes, “Yeah, I remember. Still think that he was mostly motivated by the ballroom dance teacher, Miguel, but I didn’t say that back then.”

A surge of jealousy shot through Eddie.

Get a grip, Kaspbrak, Jesus. What? You jealous of thirteen-year-old Richie’s crushes on age-inappropriate dance teachers now too?

“But yeah, for the record, I remember him on four separate occasions trying to twirl you around, even went to dip you once,” Bev grinned as Eddie lost his rhythm and almost trod on her foot.

He remembered now, the dumb shit had practically scooped him up in his arms and then unceremoniously dropped him, all in one-less-than-smooth move.

His moves had definitely improved since then, though. If his dance

with Frankie was anything to go by.

Dammit. Eyes on Bev, asswipe.

He forced his gaze back, only to find his friend looking up at him with a knowing smile and warm glint in her eyes.

“I think you should ask Richie to dance, Eddie.”

~*~

♪ *Saying I love you, is not the words I want to hear from you...* ♪

God, Richie despised this song. Was pretty sure everyone did. But, he still let himself be led further onto the dance floor and away from Bev, who seemed to be on a mission for a new dance partner, anyway.

“I didn’t think you’d say yes,” Frankie murmured as they joined hands, their others tentatively resting on each other waists as they began to sway.

Richie forced himself not to look around self-consciously again, swallowing around the lump in his throat.

If only thirteen year old Richie could see you now, Tozier. Slow dancing with a dude at a party. Who the fuck could ever see that coming?

Pity it's not the guy you actually want to dance with, though.

“Yeah, well, can never resist a good ole’ fashioned waltz. Just ask Bev.”

Frankie laughed, looking down at their feet, “Waltz? Is that what we’re doing?”

Richie shrugged, “Close enough.”

A beat passed between them, where Richie mostly ignored the dumb lyrics and stared at Ben doing some impressive attempts at a group dance.

“I uh...just wanna say sorry again. For the whole Truth thing. I really didn’t mean to be so...blunt.”

Richie looked back to Frankie, who for what it was worth, did look genuinely apologetic.

“What did I do that told you I love him? And how the fuck do I stop doing it?”

The words were out of his mouth before his brain had finished forming them.

He felt as surprised as Frankie looked.

It was then that Bev's loud, signature laugh grabbed his attention and his eyes bounced up, only to catch on familiar brown ones.

Richie weirdly had the urge to take a hit from Eddie's obsolete inhaler as they stared at one another from across the dance floor.

"You did *that* ," Frankie's voice broke through his trance and forced his attention back, "That *look* . It...it says it all, man. And you asked how the fuck you stop doing it?"

Richie felt himself nod.

"Honestly?" Frankie's gaze fell, "I don't think you can."

Come scream about these Losers with me on my [Tumblr](#). Also, I'm working on a follow-up to my more intense (and smutty) [Reddie fix-it](#) too :)

Notes for the Chapter:

Eddie's and Richie's critique of '90s pop does not

reflect my own taste in the slightest. Love me some cheese.

Let me know what ya thought :) these chapters are getting almost as long as Eddie's list of fake allergies

5. Extreme May Have Been Onto Something With Their Cheesy One-Hit Wonder - A Reluctant Retraction By Richard Tozier

Notes for the Chapter:

So, it's official. I have zero chill. This chapter just would not leave me alone until I got it down, so...hope you enjoy :)

♪ *But if you only knew how easy it would be to show me how you feel, more than words is all you have to do to make it real* ♪

“I fucking hate this song.”

“Yeah, you and everyone else alive in the nineties.”

Richie snorted, trying to shove down the wave of nerves surging through his gut and artfully avoiding his dance-partner's eye-line.

“So you really think I'm a lost cause then, huh?”

He felt Frankie shrug from under where one of Richie's hands rested on his shoulder.

“I didn't say that.”

“No. But you *did* say that you didn’t think I could stop whatever the fuck I do with my face whenever I look at—” he broke off, jaw tightening, “I mean, you had me clocked after one night of drinking and light conversation. Hardly bodes well for me.”

Frankie’s grip along his elbow clenched minutely.

“Hey man, I...look, this isn’t how I thought this night was gonna go, okay? When Ben first suggested I get to know his ‘funny friend’ I had no idea what I was in for. Fuck, he didn’t even tell me you were *Richie Fucking Tozier* until I was halfway to his house. Guess he figured I would be spooked off by a semi-successful celebrity.”

“Semi?” Richie quirked an eyebrow, “Ain’t nothing ‘semi’ about me, Frankie boy.”

Frankie snorted, “Right. Sure. Except your dick when those Old Spice commercials come on.”

Richie most definitely did not let out an undignified squeak.

“What—”

“Ben may have mentioned your crush on the Old Spice guy when I asked him what your type was.”

Heat flooded his cheeks.

“That’s it. I’m killing Haystack. Bev is just gonna have to marry herself or something. If anyone could do it, it’s her.”

Frankie swayed them a little closer to a couple on their right.

“Haystack?”

Richie deftly led him back towards the edge of the dance floor.

“Yeah,” he nodded, feeling a little sheepish, “Old nickname for Ben. I uh...kinda ragged on him a little for his weight when we were kids. Old habits die hard, I guess.”

“You have nicknames for Eddie, too.”

He had no response for that, and instead focussed all of his energy on not giving in to the overwhelming urge to look back over at Eddie where he was dancing (not at all badly) with Bev.

“For what it’s worth...” Richie took a breath, meeting Frankie’s gaze, “I do think you’re pretty awesome,” he said quietly, without any trace of his patented underlined humour, “...in another life, I would have really liked that expensive drink with you.”

A look of understanding passed over Frankie’s face, accompanied by

a small, but bittersweet smile.

“I would have bought you the most expensive, strongest drink on the menu. Just ya know...in case you ever change your mind.”

Both men knew he wouldn't be doing that anytime soon, but the sentiment still stood.

“And I would have bought you the cheapest, weakest cocktail, in return. Complete with an umbrella and curly straw.”

They shared a laugh.

“You'd be a fun date, Richie Tozier.”

“So would you Frankie...wait,” Richie halted their dancing, fixing him with a squinted look, “I never did get your last name.”

Frankie threw him a wink, “Gotta leave ya with some mystery, hot-shot.”

The slow song bled into something faster, causing both men to allow their hands to fall.

Frankie, for the first time that night, looked a little unsure of himself

as he put his hands into his pockets, not quite making eye-contact.

“So, guess this means you lose the bet, huh?”

That made Richie do a double-take.

“What? How—”

Frankie shrugged, “I overheard you guys talking earlier. You have good friends, Richie. Not sure just anyone would risk their hard-earned cash by deliberately setting you up on a blind date.”

Richie’s eyes travelled over to Ben, Mike, Bill and Stan who were now actively shuffling awkwardly along to the music in a circle, in true Dad-Dancing style.

They just want me to be happy.

“Yeah, they’re the best.”

A quiet fell over the two men for a moment, before something occurred to Richie, making him groan in frustration, dragging a palm down his weary face.

“They won’t just accept I lost, though. I’ll like, have to give them an

excuse, reasons. Stan will pry, Bill will prod. Bev will probably try and set me up with her marital arts instructor, and fuck knows what Ben will say to you. I'm sorry, man. I didn't want anyone getting dragged into this and Ben didn't know any bett—"

"Hey, you said in your special that you hate clowns, right?" Frankie cut across him, small smirk on his face.

Richie nodded, puzzled and a little on edge.

"I've got an idea."

Frankie jerked his head behind him, silently coaxing to Richie to follow him back over to the bar.

Richie watched him go for a moment, wondering what the hell he was getting himself into, before shrugging.

Fuck it.

He had already fought a murderous demon clown, twice, and went largely unscathed. PTSD, emotional trauma and grief, notwithstanding.

He could take a little more risk.

~*~

♪ More than words is all you have to do to make it real, then you wouldn't have to say that you love me, 'cause I'd already know ♪

Bev was fixing him with one of those stares that said the ball was in his court. She wouldn't push things any further. Her hand did squeeze his a little tighter though, and he felt a bit comforted, encouraged even.

“If I ask him to dance,” Eddie began with heavy stress on the ‘if’, “you know he’ll try and dip me again. And we’ll probably end up crashing into one of the servers and get those little enroladinhos everywhere.”

They both knew it was a fair point. Too bad they also knew that that wasn’t remotely Bev’s point in telling him to ask Richie to dance in the first place.

“You look good, Eddie,” Bev said apropos if nothing, clearly pivoting from the dancing conversation. “L.A. suits you.”

“How dare you.”

She chuckled as Eddie twirled her and pulled her gently back into him.

“I...like L.A. I never thought I would, but. I do. A lot.”

Bev tilted her head, jade eyes twinkling, “And I think L.A. likes you back. A lot.”

“That doesn’t make sense.”

Except, it did.

God, first Stan, now Bev? Am I really that obvious?

His heart picked up pace as he mumbled, “Do the rest of the Losers know? About how I feel about...L.A.?”

Bev wound her arm around her neck so that she was half-hugging him, murmuring into his shoulder, “I don’t think so. You know those guys, smart as shit, but kinda emotionally-stunted. Stan excluded.”

He nodded, relief flooding him. Eddie loved his friends, he did. But he could not bear the idea of their pity at pathetic pining.

“Yeah, Stan uh...already made his thoughts known about my feelings for...L.A.”

God this metaphor is almost as stupid as one of Richie’s old girlfriend

jokes.

Bev nodded, her face shrouded in more sincerity than any dumb allegory deserved, “Makes sense. You and Stan you—you share something none of the rest of us do, Eddie. You both lost your lives and came back and got a second chance. Figures that Stan wouldn’t want you to—” she broke off, but Eddie heard the rest of the sentence all the same.

Waste yours.

“We’re all so proud of you, Eddie, you know that,” Bev continued, squeezing his hand again and meeting his eye, “me especially. I—I know how hard it was for you to face Myra, to leave her and start over. But you did. You’ve got a nice apartment, a good job, but you deserve so much more, honey.”

Eddie bit his bottom lip, gnawing over his next words.

“I’m not sure I do. And...and even if I did, there’s no guarantee that what I want...wants me back.”

And that was always going to be the biggest fear, wasn’t it? That if he ever grew the balls to admit to more than himself, how he felt about Richie, that it would all be for nought because Richie just...didn’t see him like that. Would never see him like that. That they were always destined to just be Richie and Eddie, childhood friends that used to bug each other on the daily, up until the day they forgot each other for twenty-plus years and were then thrown back into each other’s orbit for the horrible, no good, very bad weekend that resulted in one of

them literally dying.

Because really, Eddie had never intended to come back. When he was down in that gross sewer, gaping hole in his abdomen and bleeding profusely, he knew that he wasn't going to make it out alive. And had made his peace with that. Well, as much peace as Eddie Kaspbrak was ever able to make, that was.

So how was he to know that only a short while later he would wake up from what he thought was a very trippy dream, only to find himself mostly healed, starving and weirdly horny? (Yeah, resurrection had some weird side-effects. First chance he got, Eddie jerked it harder than he had in his entire life. And if a certain someone had made an appearance in his fantasies, that was his business.)

But the point was, Eddie had accepted his own death, after saving Richie's life, and being brave for the first time in a long, long time. He knew death was coming for him, and, well, didn't quite welcome it with open arms, but didn't exactly give it the finger either. Which was progress for him, he supposed. No. Instead, he just told Richie he fucked his mom, basked in the look that crossed his old friend's face and sat back, listening to the rest of the Losers bully a demonic alien to death, before just...fading away...

And it hadn't been a bad way to go, all things considered.

Until he woke up.

And was forced to deal with the aftermath.

Including, but not limited to, his unresolved feelings for his lanky, trashmouthed friend, that only intensified the more time they spent together.

Because life's a bitch and then you die. And then you un-die and life keeps on being a bitch, apparently.

So frankly, he never thought he'd get the chance to confront those old, long-forgotten-but-then-remembered feelings for said lanky, trashmouthed friend.

But now that he *did* have the chance, he was so fucking scared to risk it.

He had been a risk-analyst for fifteen years, for fuck's sake. He knew everything that was at stake here, everything he could and would lose if things didn't...work out. He had done the math, ruminated on the variables, and really, it all just screamed too risky. Far, far, too risky. In his professional opinion.

But in his personal opinion?

Richie would always be worth the risk.

Which was why Eddie had beep-beep-motherfucked his way to death.

But despite being worth it, despite knowing in his gut that really, no matter what happened, they could survive anything after what they had been through—unrequited love didn't have shit on circus nightmares ripping off arms and impaling chest cavities—Eddie was still a coward.

A coward that wanted the best for Richie.

And he wasn't sure if he would ever be the best in anything.

Except number of neuroses. You'll always be number one in that, Eddie Spaghetti.

"Hey," a palm gently pressed against his cheek, "where'd you go, Kaspbrak? Backstreet Boys is starting."

Eddie shook his head, realizing that indeed the slow, cheesy song was over and had bled into a faster, cheesier song.

Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Richie vacate the makeshift dance floor, following behind Frankie who was making his way back to the bar like a man on a mission.

Perhaps he was.

To get in Richie's pants.

Eddie's stomach rolled.

"Looks like Richie is done with dancing. He might actually get the guys to pay up by the end of the night."

The bitterness in his tone was not attractive, but he couldn't help it.

A line formed between Bev's perfectly sculpted eyebrows.

"Yeah, I tried to put a stop to the bet. And Ben's brilliant blind date idea, but you know what they're like when they get something in their heads," she rolled her eyes, but looked far too fond before she remembered herself, frowning deeper and squeezing Eddie's shoulder.

"Sorry, honey. I can't imagine how much this is hurting you. I...I should have tried harder to—"

Eddie cut her off with a shake of his head.

"No, not your fault, Bev. It's mine. I...I had my chance. Fourteen months of chances. Or 29 years, depending how you look at it. Richie he—he deserves happiness and the guys were just looking out for him. Trying to help him. They weren't to know that I—" he shook his head, seeing in his peripheral vision that said guys, Ben, Bill, Mike

and Stan, were now making their way over to the bar where Richie and Frankie were back standing, heads close together, whispering feverishly.

He forced his attention back to Bev.

“I thought about...coming out, after Richie did.”

Bev’s eyebrows raised up to her hairline.

Eddie swallowed around the Sahara in his throat. He had no intention of saying the words out loud, but now that they sat there, he didn’t feel as scared by them. Maybe Bev’s warm gaze was helping.

“But uh...I didn’t wanna steal Richie’s thunder,” he continued lowly, rubbing the back of his neck. “I—I know how hard it was for him. Being a queer kid in a shithole like Derry and then...then trying to ignore that part of yourself as you grew up. So I...I didn’t say anything. Even after leaving Myra and moving to the other side of the country. After practically moving in with him and sharing my life with him I...I still couldn’t say...”

And still can’t say now, apparently. Slow clap, Kaspbrak.

Bev enveloped him in a tight hug and it hit Eddie then just how ridiculous they must have looked, standing stock-still in between wildly dancing people, arms locked around each other, ignoring the

dulcet tones of the cheesy band Ben once called the *Dollar-Store New Kids*.

“It’s okay, Eddie,” Bev whispered in his ear, “You’re okay. Don’t beat yourself up, sweetie. You went through a lot in your life and in your relationship and...it can be hard to come to terms with all that and try to make a positive change. Trust me. I know.”

Bev married her abusive parent too.

And just like he and Stan had a line of connection, Eddie and Beverly also did too. She had been instrumental in helping him formulate his plan to leave his wife. She had set him up with her divorce lawyer, walked him through the logistics of packing up his life and moving thousands of miles away. She had sat on the phone with him at 3am as he ran through every possible scenario, every fear, every worry he had about what he planned on doing. She had assured him at every possible point she could that he was 100% doing the right thing.

So why won’t you listen to her now then, asshole?

~*~

“Okay, they’re coming over.”

Play it cool, Tozier.

You've never been cool a day in your life, dickweed.

"So yeah, I try to get away from the gym as much as I can too," Frankie continued just a little louder, throwing him a small wink as Ben, Bill, Mike and Stan stopped a few feet from them, talking amongst themselves.

"Me too, man. My gym membership card from 2006 is gathering dust in the back of my bedside table," Richie smirked, chewing on one of those tasty appetizers and awaiting Frankie's next line.

"Well, I more meant that I try to have hobbies outside of working out."

They shared a smile.

"Ah, makes sense," Richie conceded with a tilt of his head, "so what do you do on your days off?"

He geared himself up for as natural of a reaction as he good muster. But he was never much of an actor, if his friends were to be believed, anyway.

Just replicate the what-the-fuck reaction you had five minutes ago, Tozier. The guys might buy it if you don't look directly at them.

Frankie cleared his throat, nonchalantly taking a sip of his drink.

Asshole. Making this look easy. He should have been an acting coach.

“I do a bit of children’s entertaining. Mostly for my nieces and nephews at the weekends, but sometimes birthday parties and stuff too.”

Richie hid his smirk behind his hand as he watched Ben out of the corner of his eye, who was doing a pretty bad job at looking like he wasn’t eavesdropping.

“Oh?” He asked, adopting his very best tone of innocence, “Kids entertainment, huh? So like, a magician or—”

“A clown.”

The sound of a glass clattering against the bar, caused both men to whirl around.

Ben was outright staring at them now, his eyes wide.

“ *Clown* , huh?” Richie asked, staring right back at Ben who was still gaping. “That’s uh... *interesting* .”

Bill, Mike and Stan were varying levels of surprised, clearly conflicted on if they should contribute anything to the conversation or not.

“I um...didn’t know that about you, Frank,” Ben piped up, sounding a little winded, before waving a hand at Richie, “Can I...speak to you for a sec, Rich?”

“Sure, Benny boy.”

He gave a nod to Frankie, raised his eyebrows at the other Losers, before following Ben out to the hallway, blinking slowly as he watched his friend wring his hands nervously.

Guilt gnawed at his insides.

“Shit, Rich, I...I’m sorry, man. I had no idea, I swear. If I had known —”

Richie clapped a hand on his shoulder, cutting him off.

“Benjo, relax. Not your fault, man. I know you were just trying to do something nice for me. And you were right, Frankie is a good guy, creepy hobby excluded.”

Ben nodded, still looking troubled.

Richie was a sucker for the kicked-puppy look.

He took a step forward, enveloping his friend in a hug, patting his back, gently.

“Alright, alright. No harm done, okay? I appreciate you trying, man, I do. I had fun, Frankie and I did really hit it off. He’s cool and funny and hot as hell, he’s just—”

Not Eddie he finished in his head.

Despite the incomplete sentence, Ben nodded all the same.

“A clown enthusiast,” he murmured, looking slightly ill.

Richie nodded back, as if that was indeed how he planned on ending that sentence.

“I’ll uh...let him down easy. Say I’m just not ready to date or something. Who knows, I could always do with a new poker buddy, so it’s not a complete loss.”

He nudged Ben with his shoulder, marvelling not for the first time at how solid his old friend was.

“Come on, future-Mr-Marsh, let’s see how future-Mrs-Hanscom is doing tearing up the dance floor.”

~*~

Richie saddled up to Frankie fifteen minutes later, they alone again, the rest of the Losers having dispersed throughout the room, very obviously making themselves scarce.

“So...you *really hate* clowns, huh?”

Richie angled his head to look at him.

“You could say that.”

It was meant to be said with levity, his usual humour lacing his words, but instead, it came out more grave and ominous than he intended. He could practically feel Frankie’s frown as he grappled with his next question, one that which Richie was thankfully prepared for.

“Why?”

Richie shrugged, “Childhood trauma. A lot of it. Probably enough to fill a giant-ass book or like, two blockbuster movies.”

He heaved a sigh, watching as Bev and Eddie spun Ben around in a weird square-dance formation.

Fuck. We really are all shitty dancers.

“Coulrophobia.”

“What?”

“Coulrophobia,” Frankie repeated, “a persistent and irrational fear of clowns. Sounds like that’s what you have.”

Richie scoffed, turning to stare at him, “Nothing irrational about it, trust me. There are *plenty* of reasons to be afraid of clowns. Their creepy makeup, their dumb clothes, their razor sharp teeth and claws that skewer your friend to death right in front of you.”

“What?”

Richie blinked, his words catching up to him.

“Nothing. I’m kidding.”

Frankie squinted at him, “That’s a weird joke.”

“Yeah well, I’m a weird guy.”

A beat of silence passed before Richie cleared his throat, forcing himself to look the other man in the eye.

“Hey, thanks for uh...understanding and being so cool about this. I’m sorry I couldn’t—”

Frankie held up a hand, cutting him off.

“Say no more, man. I get it. You don’t have the monopoly on loving someone and being too scared to tell them.”

Richie’s mouth dropped open.

“Oh shit, dude, who—”

“My best friend from college,” Frankie threw him a tight smile, “tall, lanky, awkward guy, but I always thought the sun shone outta his ass. You remind me a little of him, actually.”

A laugh escaped Richie’s throat.

“God. What a pair we make.”

“Yep.”

The comedian shifted his weight, elbowing him.

“You should tell him how you feel.”

Frankie snorted, “Pot meet kettle.”

He’s got you there, Trashmouth.

“If anything, you should tell Eddie how you feel first. I mean, haven’t you guys known each other since grade school?”

Richie’s eyes trailed over to where Eddie was now coaxing Ben under a limbo stick, that he acquired from fuck-knew-where, his face flushed with laughter as Mike beat him to it, impressively limber for a guy who spent most of his life sat at a desk, researching ancient rituals and prehistoric murder aliens.

“Yeah,” he smiled, not even caring that his tone was embarrassingly soft, “I’ve known that loser since I was five years old.”

“And been in love with him nearly as long, right?”

Richie let his silence speak for him.

“Yeah,” Frankie smiled, clinking his glass against Richie’s, “you got it bad, Tozier.”

That I do, Frankie Mysterious Last Name. That I do.

~*~

All in all, Bev and Ben’s engagement party was a roaring success. Appetizers were eaten, music was danced to, speeches were made and love confessions were shared. Not to the recipient of said love, but it was a start.

“Ooh Benjamin, I do not envy your hangover in the morning,” Richie smirked as he collapsed onto the couch that still sat on the edges of the living room from where it had been pushed back to make a dance floor.

“It is the morning, Rich,” Bill grinned, ruffling Ben’s hair like a bemused father as he passed him before sitting down heavily on a nearby arm chair.

Stan glanced at his watch, humming. “Yep, 4:35.”

Mike snorted, looking around where all of the Losers were beginning to lounge all together, on chairs, love seats and in Ben’s case, the floor.

“This reminds me of the sleepovers we used to have at your place, Richie.”

Richie looked up, watching as the Losers all got comfortable. Bev and Mike on the loveseat, her feet in his lap, Bill slumped on the armchair, Stan perched on a futon, Ben spread-eagled on the floor and Eddie...Eddie walking towards Richie, sinking down into the couch beside him, his thigh pressing against his.

Richie's breath hitched in his throat.

“Yeah. Just like old times,” Eddie answered, stifling a yawn.

“Aw, Eddie Spaghetti, is it past your bedtime?”

“Think it's past everyone's bedtime, jerkface.”

Richie chuckled, leaning further into him and nudging his shoulder, “Jerkface? Now there's one I haven't heard in like two decades. Trust you to bring the nostalgia, Eds.”

An adorable flush rose in Eddie's cheeks.

Richie could feel several pairs of eyes on the two of them as they stared at one another for one beat, two beats, three—

“So, when are we getting our money, Rich?”

Richie’s reluctantly tore away from Eddie so he could glare at Bill.

“Geez, Denbrough. Way to kick a man while he’s down. Not my fault Benardo set me up with Pennywise 2.0.”

He could see the look of perplexity emanating from Eddie from the corner of his eye.

Ben let out a loud, muffled groan from down on the floor.

Richie leaned forward to watch as his friend covered his face with hands, continuing to groan through his fingers.

“I swear I had no idea he—”

“No, no, I get it Benscom,” Richie grinned, gearing himself up to mercilessly tease his friend with his flippancy, “You wanted me to bone Frankie to like, work through my trauma and shit. That homophobic dickhole tortured me back in the day, but now I can get my sweet revenge on ol’ Pen by going to pound-town with a clow—”

“Pennywise used your sexuality against you?”

The rest of Richie's words died in his throat as Eddie fixed him with a widened, almost concerned glance.

Suddenly, the levity evaporated from the room.

"Uh..." Richie wracked his brain for a response, but finding nothing better than an unsteady, "Yeah? Turns out extraterrestrial child killers are *super* homophobic. Who knew?"

A look of alarm crossed Eddie's face.

"Shit, of course *It* preyed on that, the goddamn asshole. Fuck, Richie, that...that must have sucked..." he trailed off lamely, but reached out and squeezed Richie's wrist, his thumb gently sweeping across his skin.

More than words...

Richie blinked, clearing his throat and basking in the warmth of Eddie's touch.

I know your secret. Your dirty, little—

"Eh. It was nothing Bowers and his cronies didn't say and do already. Minus the Paul Bunyan statue trying to eat me," he shrugged,

violently recalling '*Richie Tozier sucks flamer cock*' written on practically every square-inch of their middle school in magic marker.

Eddie must have seen something in his face because he squeezed his wrist a little tighter.

“Frankie was cool and all,” Mike piped up, clearly in an attempt to dissipate the bad memories as he rested his cheek atop of Bev’s head, where she was leaning it against his shoulder, eyes heavily-lidded, “But I couldn’t really get past how he kinda looked like Eddie. Weirderd me out. Like an off-brand clone on steroids.”

Richie’s heart leapt into his throat.

That was it. His friends were clearly trying to kill him.

“Wait, *what* ?”

Richie felt Eddie stiffen beside him, his thumb stalling on his wrist as he threw Mike a puzzled glance.

Mike, who had clearly realised what he had just said, floundered, his mouth opening and closing several times before Stan jumped in:

“I dunno, Mikey. Brown hair and brown eyes does not an Eddie make.”

And that, ladies and gentlemen, is why Stan is, in fact, The Man.

Ben bolted upright, eyes flying to Richie, something wild and pleading in them.

Ah. Benny boy has finally realised the resemblance. Guess he really didn't set Frankie up with me because he figured out my crush on Eds Spagheds, after all.

Eddie snorted, clearly recovered from shock, his fingers still curled around Richie's wrist, who was internally trying to slow his quickening heart rate, "That guy looked nothing like me. If he did, Richie would have run for the hills."

A chorus of polite chuckles that sounded less than sincere rippled throughout the Losers.

Richie stayed silent, eyes studying the floor.

After a moment, Bev clapped a palm on Mike's knee and used it as leverage to stand up slowly, swaying only a little (which was extra impressive, considering she drank stronger liquor than any other person here) as she bent down to her fiancé, offering him her hand.

"Well, my bed is calling. Night everybody, brunch is on Ben. Carmen's at twelve. C'mon, Hanscom, up and at 'em."

Ben allowed his fiancée to haul him up off the floor, more of a hindrance than a help, but Bev managed it with ease, smiling at him, fondly rolling her eyes, as they wound arms around each other's shoulders and began slowly shuffling from the room.

"Night, guys. Love you," drunk Ben called sweetly over his shoulder.

"Love you too, Loser," they all replied in unison as if they had practiced it.

It really was uncanny how they seemed to read each other's minds, sometimes.

Stan was next to head to bed, giving them a small wave and murmuring something about calling Patricia, who unfortunately couldn't make it that night. Mike was next, punching Bill good-naturedly on the shoulder, his eyes flickering over Richie and Eddie with an enigmatic gleam, before he bid them adieu.

Bill drained the last of his drink, stretching his entire body like a tipsy cat before standing up, a loud creaking sound emitting from the vicinity of his knees.

Richie and Eddie both winced.

"Fuck, I'm getting old," the writer grumbled before sighing and

turning on his heel.

“Aren’t we all, Billy boy,” Richie called after him.

Bill raised his middle finger without a backwards glance, directing it behind him.

“Goodnight old man,” Eddie added with a small smile that only Richie could see.

“Fuck you both.”

The living room door closed with a snap.

And then there were two...

Richie leaned back into the armrest, stroking his chin like a wise, old monk.

One outta three ain’t bad.

"Is it just me or is Bill shrinking with age? Think he might actually be shorter than *you* now, Eds."

"Newsflash, asshole," Eddie's signature karaoke chop flew in front of his face, "Bill has been shorter than me this entire time. He's 5'7" and I'm 5'9". You just refuse to accept it."

"Whatever man, anyone under 5'10" looks the same to me."

"Heightist."

They both broke into quiet laughter, their shaking shoulders brushing together. After a moment, Eddie stilled, looking down at their hands. Clearing his throat, he gently let go of Richie's wrist, as if only now realizing it had been there the whole time.

Richie ignored the pang in his chest.

"So, a part-time clown, huh?" Eddie piped up, not looking at him, "That's shitty luck."

Richie shrugged, wiping his palms on his knees, "Yep. The curse of Richie Tozier strikes again."

A beat of silence passed between them.

"Don't worry, Rich. You'll...you'll find someone perfect for you."

That caught his attention, his eyes raising and catching on the chestnut ones that he loved so much.

“You really think so?”

Eddie nodded, every inch of him sincere, “I know so. Whatever...whatever *It* told you, made you see back then, none of it was true. You’re...anyone would be lucky to have you, Rich.”

Richie’s heart raced, warmth blooming in his stomach.

God, loving him was never dirty. Fuck that clown.

"And anyone would be lucky to have you, Eds," he replied softly, knowing his face was giving entirely too much away, but not having the energy to care.

Eddie scoffed, "a 41-year-old divorcee with neuroses out the wazoo, who married his mother and is now rockin' two scars that would scare kids Freddy-Krueger-style? I doubt it."

Richie blinked. Eddie always did have a way with words. Even when they were complete and utter bullshit.

He nudged Eddie's knee with his, fixing him with his most poignant stare.

"What the fuck are you talkin' about, Kaspbrak? You're a total catch. Yeah, you're a 41-year-old divorcee who married his mother, but uh...hello? You also *divorced* her. So that's struck off. And yeah okay, you have a few issues that some people would call neurotic, but shit man, who doesn't? And as for the scars...haven't you heard? They're sexy as fuck. Chicks dig 'em."

That flush that Richie was addicted to, reappeared, before something unreadable passed over Eddie's face.

Slowly, he turned, angling his body towards Richie on the couch as he mumbled something so quietly that Richie had to lean forward to hear him:

"And...what about dudes? Do they, uh, dig 'em?"

Richie stopped breathing.

~*~

Eddie Kaspbrak you fucking moron, what the fuck did you say that for?!

Out of all the ways Eddie had thought about casually letting Richie know that he was not straight, inquiring whether dudes would find his scars sexy, was not one of them.

And yet. Here they were.

"I...uh..."

Richie looked like he was malfunctioning, clearly shocked by the implication. But just before Eddie could somehow take it back, make some sort of joke to ease the sting of embarrassment, Richie began frantically nodding his head.

"Shit, Eds, yeah. Dudes too. Everybody finds you sexy, scars or no scars. Trust me."

There was a beat, where Richie looked like he was reflecting on what he just said, his eyes wide behind his glasses, crimson creeping up his neck.

He said everybody finds me sexy. Not that everybody finds scars sexy. Richie is...an 'everybody.'

Something jolted low in Eddie's stomach at Richie's words and the sincerity behind them. It was then that he realised just how close he and Richie were sitting, their knees pressing together as they sat sideways, angled towards each other.

The air was electric. Sparking with everything that had been left unsaid between them for fourteen months and twenty-nine years now. Eddie just wished he could tell if Richie's unsaid somethings aligned with his.

I fucking love you, you gigantic dork.

"Oh so everybody finds me sexy, huh? Good to know, Tozier."

He sounded far too winded for somebody who was meant to be teasing somebody else, but it was all he could manage under the microscope that was Richie Tozier's stare.

"Yeah, Eddie," Richie responded, his own voice far too soft, "everybody thinks you're the sexiest person in any room."

There's that 'everybody' again.

Eddie's heart hammered in his chest so hard that he could feel it in his ears. Arousal sparked deep in his abdomen as he met Richie's eyes, a fire behind him that he wasn't sure he had ever seen before.

"Oh yeah?" He breathed, "Even rooms that Ben is in?"

A flicker of amusement broke through Richie's heated stare.

"It's close, but I think you just edge out in front."

Eddie bit his lip, trying to stop the pleased grin that wanted to spread across his face.

As he was playing such close attention to Richie, he didn't fail to notice when those slightly-magnified, dark eyes flickered downwards, catching on Eddie's bottom lip.

Holy shit, are we flirting?

An excited thrill thrummed through Eddie, heat spreading from his abdomen throughout his body. Without conscious decision, he leaned closer into Richie, his tongue darting out to wet his bottom lip.

Richie continued to stare, swallowing deeply, his breathing a little ragged.

Fuck, I wanna kiss him.

The thought didn't startle Eddie in the slightest, not like it would have, even six months ago. Guess his talks with Stan and Bev did help, after all.

"Thanks Rich. I mean, you're clearly lying, there's no way I'm sexier than Ben 'you look like every Italian soccer player rolled into one' Hanscom, but I appreciate you saying so."

Richie shook his head, tilting closer to him, eyes still on his lips, "I-

I'm not lying, Eds. I've always thought you were the most beautiful person in any room."

~*~

Richie froze.

What the ever loving fuck are you doing, you tipsy bastard?!

Eddie's eyes widened, his mouth falling open slightly.

Fuck! Abort! Abort, Trashmouth! Make a dumb joke now, dammit! Don't fuck this up, don't ruin your friendship because you're drunk and horny and so in fucking love with him—

" Always ?"

Eddie gasped out that two syllable word as if he had to run a marathon to say it. He sounded bewildered, like he couldn't have possibly heard Richie right.

It hurt Richie to think that Eddie couldn't believe the truth when he heard it. Which could only explain his next sentence:

"Yeah, Eds. Always. Since we were kids, kinda always. You...you've

always been fuckin' gorgeous, man."

Right. 'Cause adding 'man' to the end of the sentence really makes it less gay. Good goin', dickhead.

Eddie looked dumbstruck. And on anyone else, it would have looked downright hilarious to Richie. But on Eddie, it looked like the most beautiful thing he had ever seen.

"You..." Eddie mumbled, sounding a little strangled, "You think I'm...gorgeous? Sexy? Beautiful? You—I swear to God, Richie, if you're fucking with me—"

"I'm not," he cut across him desperately, his hand reaching out and claspng the other man's knee unbeknownst to himself, "I've never been more serious in my life, Eddie."

Eddie glanced down to his knee which was the precise moment Richie realised he was squeezing it in a death grip.

He went to snatch it away but before he could move an inch, Eddie pressed his palm down across Richie's hand, thumb tracing patterns on the back of it as his eyes met his again.

"I was so fucking jealous of Frankie tonight, I thought I was gonna deck him."

Richie's eyebrows raised. That was not what he had expected Eddie to say.

"What—"

"I was just so blinded by...You kept looking at him, in a way that...that I wanted you to look...at me. I—I always wanted you to look at me, Rich. Since we were kids, kinda always."

Richie's heart jolted.

Cool your jets, Romeo. It doesn't mean he—,

"It got so bad that I'd climb into that deathtrap of a hammock just to be close to you. To feel your fingers on my ankle. I—I wanted your attention all the time and I'd be the most annoying little shit just to get it. It just...took me twenty-seven years to realise what that really meant."

That you're a touch-starved, little—

"I had a crush on you."

Richie's heart stopped.

Holy fucking shit. I'm dead. I fucking died. I'm stuck in the deadlights, brain turned to mush, a lanky vegetable that's stuck in a messed up dream. There's no way—

"Shit, fuck, I—forget I said anything, I'm drunk," Eddie rambled, leaping up off the couch as if burned, clearly misinterpreting Richie's silence, "I'll see you in the morning, Rich—"

"*It did* use my sexuality against me," Richie called out, having no recollection of standing up but found himself barely a foot from Eddie nonetheless, "but that wasn't the only thing that fuckwad had on me."

Eddie halted, his back still to Richie, but clearly listening.

Richie took a deep breath.

Truth or dare, Richie?

"I was in love with you."

~*~

Eddie was going to pass out.

No. No fucking way. He can't be serious, this has to be a—

"I was in love with you. Had been for...a while. And Pennywise, that sadistic bastard, knew it. You guys wanted to know what I was most afraid of? It was never clowns, Eddie. It was what *one* clown could have told *you*."

Eddie's feet turned him around, slowly, without much of his brain's input. When his gaze landed on Richie, his heart broke.

The man looked...shattered. Hunched in on himself, arms hugging themselves, his head low.

He's waiting to be rejected.

"Richie..." Eddie whispered, not even sure what he wanted to say, but needing to do something, anything, to get him to stop looking so...defeated.

He took a step forward, until they were standing so close that Eddie could count Richie's eyelashes, and see the teardrops clinging to them, fighting to fall.

"Richie. Look at me."

His hand reached up and cupped the taller man's cheek, gently coaxing him to raise his head.

Their eyes met.

"There is nothing, *nothing* , that asshole could have told me that would have made me love you any less. You...you were, *are* , my best friend and I—I loved you too, Richie. I was just too dumb to realise it, so Pennywise had to get creative, I guess."

A strangled sound, a cross between a laugh and a sob escaped Richie before his shoulders started to shake.

"Shit, sorry I...I don't know what's wrong with—"

"There's nothing wrong with you, Richard Tozier. *There never was* . Come here."

Eddie pulled him into a tight hug. Richie immediately wrapped his arms around him, burying his face in the side of his neck. Eddie couldn't even find it in himself to resent the fact that he had to stand on his tip-toes a little to grip the back of Richie's neck, his fingers weaving into the hairs at his nape.

They stood there for what was probably only minutes, but could have easily been hours, just breathing each other in.

"I thought I lost you."

The words were mumbled into the skin of Eddie's neck, Richie's breath bouncing off it and causing goosebumps to spread. A shiver, not unpleasantly, ran up his spine.

Richie took a step back, but not far away, his arms still enveloping Eddie's back as he spoke clearer, "I thought I lost you forever, Eds. When...when *It* stabbed you. I...I had just gotten you back, after being forced to forget you, only to watch you die in front of me after saving my life. Those...those few weeks you were gone, were the worst in my entire life."

Eddie swallowed the lump in his throat, tears stinging his eyes.

"But then you came back and—you and Stan were here again and it made me the happiest I've ever been. Living with you, seeing you every day, it's more than I could have ever asked for."

~*~

Will ever ask for, either.

He said he "had" a crush on you, Tozier. He "loved" you too. Past tense. 'Did' and 'was' doesn't mean 'still is.' Don't get ahead of yourself. Don't pressure him. Be thankful for what you hav—

"Being with you makes me the happiest I've ever been," Eddie cut across his inner-rationalization, eyes shining bright, tears beginning to roll down his face.

"I was...I was so *fucking miserable*, Rich. Stuck in a loveless marriage, in a job I hated, in a city I detested. And then I saw you again, in that shitty Chinese restaurant and it was like...no time had passed. Everything started to come back to me, everything I had felt as a kid. Every single emotion you ever made me feel, only tenfold because it was washing over me all at once, until all I could do to cope was revert back to my shitty ways. Arguing with you, antagonising you, pretending like all I wanted to do was get away from you, when the opposite was true. I...I wanted you look at me, just like you did in the hammock. I wanted you to pay attention to me and tease me and annoy me in the way only you ever could. And you did. And it was the best I had felt in decades.

"And then I died."

Eddie paused, sniffing, trying to control his breathing.

"And when I came back... I promised, I *swore* to myself, that things would change. *I* would change. I had a second chance, not many people get that. So I did the only thing that made sense. I went to you. I divorced my wife, quit my job and moved halfway across the country and shacked up in the same building as Richie Trashmouth Tozier. My best, oldest friend. And these last fourteen months have been like someone else's life. Someone calmer. More content. Happy."

He took a breath, blinking rapidly before meeting Richie's eyes again, his gaze steely with determination.

"Until I realised something that threatened to make that all go

away."

Richie's heart leapt in his chest, his stomach rolling with nausea.

Eddie tensed his arm around Richie's back, his fingers tightening in his hair, his eyes shining bright as he whispered:

"I never stopped being in love with you."

Richie blinked. Once. Twice. Three times.

Am I having a stroke?

He could feel Eddie begin to fidget in his arms, making like he was about to pull away and that just wouldn't do.

"Nope. No. You're going nowhere. I've waited thirty years to hear those words, Edward Kaspbrak. Your little ADHD ass is *not* cutting this short."

"Don't call me 'Edward.'"

"Geez, don't call you 'Eds,' don't call you 'Edward,' what the hell *can* I call—"

"Sexy, gorgeous and beautiful, apparently."

Richie let out a guffaw, rolling his damp eyes, "For fuck's sake, you're still a little shit. How the hell have I been in love with you for three goddamn decades when—mmph!"

Eddie surged up, pulling his face down and kissing him as if his life depended on it.

Richie's knees buckled, because apparently a kiss from his life-long love turned him into a fucking Victorian maiden, but Eddie steadied them before beginning to walk Richie back towards the couch.

"Too...fucking...tall," he gasped between kisses, dragging Richie down to sit next to him on the sofa.

Richie let out an embarrassingly loud groan that he will 100% deny later as Eddie's tongue traced his bottom lip. It was enough to jolt him out of his shock, his hand reaching up to clutch Eddie's cheek, his thumb brushing against the incredibly sexy scar that lay there as he opened his mouth, deepening the kiss.

Somewhere, thirteen-year-old Richie was throwing himself the party of a fucking lifetime. Before thirteen-year-old Eddie forced him to "*go the fuck outside and get some air, you Hobbit.*"

Richie started smiling into the kiss at the thought, a surge of happiness shooting through his entire body.

“Fuck, Eds,” he gasped, as Eddie started nibbling on his bottom lip, “I always knew you’d be a biter.”

Eddie shoved him, trying very hard to look like he was annoyed, but in reality, only served to look like a hot, flushed, pouter.

Cute, cute, cute!

“I’ll show you a biter, Trashmouth.”

With that, Eddie’s mouth latched onto Richie’s neck, peppering kisses along his throat before teeth began grazing his skin.

“ *Jesus Christ,* ” Richie groaned, tilting his head to give him better access, clenching the material of Eddie’s shirt in tight fists and trying not to moan so loud he wakes the Losers on the third floor.

“That a new nickname for me, or...?” Eddie smirked into his skin like the smug asshole he was, and yep, Richie was 100% fucked. Ruined.

And not in the good way.

Yet.

And *shit* ...wasn't *that* a crazy fucking thought.

Richie grabbed Eddie's face with both hands, pulling him off his neck and staring deep into those eyes that haunted his dreams for decades, even when he couldn't remember who they belonged to.

They both gasped in breaths of air for a moment, just staring at one another, twin smiles on their faces.

Gently, Richie leaned forward, pressing their lips together softly and trying to pour every emotion he had ever felt, every word he ever wanted to say, into that kiss, so that Eddie could *finally* understand what he was to Richie.

Extreme may have had a point with that dumb song...

It seemed Eddie got his silent message, if his gasp was anything to go by. With trembling hands, he clutched at Richie's shoulders, pushing himself further into him and in turn, tipping them both over.

Richie's head landed on the armrest with a soft thump.

His heart leapt into his throat as Eddie shifted them a little, so that he was practically lying on top of him.

Holy shit, I'm mackin' on a couch with Eddie Fuckin' Kaspbrak. My first wet dream is coming true.

Speaking of coming...

He knew he should have been embarrassed that he was already half-hard from a bit of making out, but honestly, Richie couldn't find it in himself to give a shit. Not after wanting this for so, so long. Frankly, he was surprised he hadn't come in his pants like a teenager the second Eddie's lips brushed his.

Reaching up, he ran a hand through Eddie's hair, tugging on it a little, very pleased to hear him mewl in response.

Filing that away for later...

"Shit, Rich," Eddie gasped as Richie trailed his hands down his sides to grip his hips, pulling him down further on top of him.

A spark of arousal shot straight to his dick when he felt the tell-tale sign that Eddie was just as affected as he was.

Holy shit, I gave Eddie a boner. My second wet dream is coming true!

"You know," Eddie murmured when Richie broke their kiss, to mouth

at his jaw, tongue scraping against his five-o'clock shadow, "if I'd known that this was all it took to get you to shut up for five seconds, I would've done it a long time ago."

I wish you had, Eds. All the time we lost...

Richie mentally shook his head, banishing those thoughts. It didn't matter, they were here now. That was what was important.

He peppered kisses along Eddie's jaw before pulling back, staring up into the face of the man he loved.

He couldn't help but cast his mind back to the last time he was lying face up, Eddie staring down at him.

Rich, hey Rich, I think I killed It for real—

"I'm sorry I didn't save you, Eds."

Eddie frowned at him for a moment, before he took in their position, understanding dawning on his face. Gently, he stroked Richie's cheek, brushing away a tear, before leaning down and pressing their foreheads together.

Richie shut his eyes, trying to shove the memory away.

"You couldn't have done anything, Rich," Eddie mumbled, their lips mere millimetres apart, "And I don't regret it. I'd do it all over again if it meant you saving you from the Deadlights."

Richie rose up, closing that tiny space and pecking his lips. Because he could do that, now.

Fucking bonkers.

"I wanted to kiss you to wake you up, like Ben did for Bev," Eddie smiled against him, "some real Disney, true-love's-kiss and all that. But, after sitting through Ben's self-flagellation on the issues of consent, I thought better of it."

Richie chuckled, remembering that talk vividly, how Ben had beaten himself up over kissing Bev when she was in the trance, feeling guilty for his kid-self's actions after all this time.

"Well, just so you know, you have one-hundred-percent consent to kiss me all you want, Kaspbrak," he winked.

Eddie snickered, "You're a giant dork, you know that?"

"Gotta be for The Losers Club, asshole."

Eddie leaned down and captured Richie's lips with his again, their tongues brushing before he abruptly pulled back, to Richie's chagrin.

“Holy shit, Rich. You know what this means?”

Richie tried not to pout.

“What?”

A smile slowly spread across Eddie's downright mischievous face.

“You won the bet.”

[My Tumblr](#). [And other fic](#). If you want more of my Reddie nonsense.

Notes for the Chapter:

So that was super fun to write!

An epilogue featuring the Benverly wedding, and that dance that Eddie has to ask Richie for will happen. Along with some smut. If anyone is into reading that. Let me know :)

6. Four Weddings and a Funeral, Minus Three Weddings and A Funeral - The Ever After of Richard Tozier & Edward Kaspbrak

Summary for the Chapter:

The epilogue - featuring The Benverly Wedding, domestic Reddie and...their next big step?

Notes for the Chapter:

Okay, so full disclosure, this epilogue (like this entire feckin' story) got away from me. So, I split it into two parts. The second half is nearly finished so the actual, legit, final chapter will be up soon. I blood oath promise. Enjoy 8,000 words of mush!

tw for some homophobic slurs Richie recalls from childhood

“Sayin’ I love you, is not the words I want to hear from you...”

“I thought you hated that song?”

“It’s not that I want you not to say—”

“Seriously, Rich, my ears are bleeding.”

“—but if you only knew how easaaaaay, it would be to—show! Me! How! You *feeeeeeeel* —”

“Dear god, I beg you, please stop.”

“More than worrrrrds, is all you have to—mmph!”

Richie stumbled a little as Eddie’s mouth covered his, cutting off his (in his not-so-humble opinion) beautiful rendition of the 1991 classic. He let himself get lost in the kiss for a moment, reveling in the feel of Eddie clutching at the unraveled tie draped around his neck, pulling him down to his level.

“So that’s the plan, huh?” He gasped as they broke apart, lips barely separated from each other by an inch, “You’re really just gonna kiss me every time you want me to shut up?”

Eddie shrugged, head tilted, eyes narrowed, “It works, doesn’t it?”

Richie scoffed, “You realise how much kissing that is, right? Also, it’s definitely rewarding bad behaviour. So, kinda counter-productive on your part.”

Eddie tugged on his tie again, rising up on his tip-toes and tracing along Richie’s bottom lip with his tongue.

“Are you complaining?” He murmured against his mouth, pecking him chastely once, twice.

“Hmm,” Richie pressed forward, thumb stroking over Eddie’s scarred

cheek, “Nope. No. This is the kinda ‘beep beep, Richie’ I can get behind.”

He could practically feel Eddie roll his eyes, but before he could no doubt roast Richie for being his sappy self, a knock sounded throughout the apartment.

Eddie broke the kiss, ignoring Richie’s high-pitched whine of protest, and made his way over to the door, leaning up to look through the peephole. Flashing a grin over his shoulder, he quickly opened the door wide to reveal a beaming Rosalita Hernandez holding out a plate wrapped in foil.

“Ay, Dios Mio, Eddie. If I was twenty years younger, I would have let you sweep me off my feet,” she exclaimed, eyes sparkling with delight as she stepped in.

“What are you talking about, Mrs Hernandez? *You sweep me off my feet every time I see you.* I’m leaving this guy any day now,” Eddie smirked as he gratefully took the batch of oatmeal cookies from her with a kiss to her cheek and ushering her further into the room.

Richie threw them both a scandalized look before shrugging, stepping forward to kiss her cheek too, “Nah, I get it. You’re a total catch, Mrs H. Can’t say I blame him. My oatmeal cookies could never match up to yours for a start.”

Eddie’s eyes twinkled as his gaze caught Richie’s, small smile on his face, “Yeah, we had a good run.”

Rosalita looked between the two with a bemused expression before rolling her eyes, “Sí, sí, I get it, I’m amazing. Now,” she clapped her hands, “let me get a picture of the happy couple while we still can!”

Richie felt himself flush, heat rising up his neck and into his cheeks.

It may have been ten months since he and Eds got their collective shit together and made out like a couple of horny teenagers on Ben and Bev’s couch, but the words *happy couple* still managed to make his stomach do somersaults.

“ *Rosa* ,” he groaned with a pout, “You know I look like Oscar the Grouch in photographs. Even when I’m wearing a fancy penguin suit.”

The older woman leveled him with her patented arched eyebrow.

“You are just as handsome as this one, Ricardo,” she jerked her head towards Eddie who had deposited the cookies on the table, gesturing at them to stand together, “Now, act like you like each other and smile!”

“Yeah, *Ricardo* , act like you like me,” Eddie teased him under his breath before leaning up and fastening his tie into a Windsor knot, smoothing the fabric down against Richie’s chest.

Richie's breath caught in his throat as he watched him complete the task.

Oh I like you, alright.

"There. Now you look more like a well-dressed Bert."

"Ha, ha. You're one to talk, *Ernie* ," Richie deadpanned, silently thinking how personality-wise, he and Eddie would most definitely be reversed.

Eddie punched him in the shoulder (a true Bert-move, if you know, Sesame Street allowed violence) and stepped away, glancing behind him at Rosalita.

"One sec, Mrs H. Just gotta grab my tie."

Richie and Rosa watched him dart towards the bedroom, doing his, what Richie playfully called "white-person-shuffle."

Rosalita stepped closer to Richie, reaching up and clutching his shoulder, her warm, brown eyes gleaming with sincerity.

"Marry that boy, mijo."

Richie's heart skipped a beat as he took in a shaky breath, murmuring softly:

"Working on it, Ro."

It was a lie. He wasn't working on it, not really.

Over the last ten months, he and Eddie had made leaps in bounds in their relationship. The latter finally 'gave up the ghost' like Richie suggested and moved into his apartment after they had been steadily dating for three months, it soon becoming *their* apartment. Now, seven months after that, they had recently opened a joint savings account, Eddie's car was now *their* car, (" *mine is more practical and less of a death trap, Richard,*") they were each other's emergency contact (although neither admitted to the other that that had pretty much been the case since Eddie first moved to L.A.) and they were kinda thinking about adopting a dog.

Richie had suggested a Pomeranian to which Eddie gave an emphatic *hell no*.

("Aw, but Eds! Pennywise the Pom just sounds right! Penny for short!")

Basically, they were about as married as a couple could be without the papers and shindig. Not that either one of them would ever phrase it like that.

And still, like any couple, they argued over the remote, they took

turns taking out the trash, although most of the time it fell to Eddie as he was more 'thorough' whatever the fuck that meant, one of them made dinner that the other would clean up while simultaneously filling each other in on their days, and before sleep, they would sit up in bed, side-by-side like couples in a sitcom, Eddie with his book and old-man-reading-glasses and Richie slumped over his phone, killing it on Candy Crush, before they pecked each other on the lips, mumbling tired "goodnights."

And those were just the nights they didn't have sex. Which honestly, were few and far between, 'cause despite their age, Richie and Eddie were trying their darnedest to make up for lost time, by, among other things, having *tonnes of sex* .

Lots and lots of sex.

Like, marathon-style sex.

The most sex either of them had had in their entire lives, put together.

It was fuckin' *awesome* .

Life, in Richie's opinion, really could not get any better.

Except...he did find himself wondering wistfully sometimes, what it would be like to take that next step with Eddie. Hell, if he was honest with himself, he had been thinking about it back when he was a kid

and the idea of a man marrying another man seemed like an impossible dream, something teenage him would have scoffed at, yet yearned for desperately.

But the reality was, Eddie had already been married once before. And it had been a disaster of monstrous proportions. Something which, Richie knew, still featured heavily in Eddie's weekly therapy sessions with Dr. Broflovski. And besides, they hadn't been in a romantic relationship a full year yet, and even if they were for ten years, who was to say that Eddie would *ever* want to make that trip down the aisle again?

Richie couldn't risk it. Couldn't risk the amazing life they already had, by spooking Eddie into thinking he wanted something from him that Eddie may never, ever want again.

But that didn't mean that Richie didn't conveniently pass the jewelry store on his way home from running errands most days, just to stare in the window at two silver bands, sitting together in a small, faux-leather box.

He never went inside, though. He just...looked at them through the glass. Maybe fantasised a little about what the weight would feel like on his left hand. How it would look to see himself on TV, in posters, with the glint of silver resting against a microphone. The rush he would get from saying, *my husband, this is my husband Eddie, have you met my hus—*

He never let himself think too long about it, either. And has never once brought up the W-word, the H-word or the M-word around Eddie. Which, in recent weeks had become incredibly difficult with, you know, Ben and Bev's upcoming Wedding, where Ben would be

made a Husband and he and Bev would both hopefully have a long and happy Marriage.

“You’ll be next ,” his agent had joked on the phone to him only a week ago, *“ Just make sure you’re not one of those disgustingly happy husbands obsessed with their spouses, you don’t wanna alienate the divorcée market.”*

Richie snorted, *“ Seems to be working out fine for John Mulaney.”*

“Yeah Rich,” she agreed airily, *“but you’re no John Mulaney.”*

She had a point there, he supposed.

So, Richie kept quiet. Basked in his life as it already was, and loving every second of it.

If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it, jerkwad.

“Oh, look at *him* ,” Rosalita’s awed tone and elbow to his sternum shook Richie from his reverie, “he looks like something out of Bride and Groom magazine.”

Richie looked up, his heart skipping a beat as he saw Eddie walk towards him, tie neatly knotted, emerald handkerchief that matched Richie’s folded firmly in his breast-pocket.

He really could have passed for a groom.

Richie's stomach did another somersault.

"Yeah, he cleans up alright, doesn't he?" He forced himself to say, far too winded to be truly teasing.

"You flatter me," Eddie deadpanned, eyes rolling to the ceiling before he stepped into his space, brow furrowed, "how the hell did you manage to already mess up your tie, Tozier? I was gone five seconds."

Before Richie could protest, he reached up and straightened Richie's already perfectly-straight tie.

"I don't know what he'd do without you, Eddie," Rosalita sighed like a put-upon mother.

Richie did.

It had involved a lot of depression, chain-smoking, crying and borderline-alcoholism.

He sent up his daily thanks to the cosmically-magic-turtle for saving Eddie (and Stan) from an eternal sleep. And in turn, saving Richie

from himself.

Something in Eddie's face told Richie that he somehow knew what Richie was thinking as he reached out and gently squeezed his wrist.

“Oh I don't know, he'd probably still think Kraft Mac 'n' Cheese and boxed wine from Walmart constitutes him making dinner.”

Richie let out a gasp, placing his free hand over his chest dramatically, “ *Excuse me* , Mr Kaspbrak. I'll have you know, with or without you, I *still* think Kraft Mac 'n' Cheese and Franzia Rosé is the perfect dinner.”

Eddie and Mrs Hernandez shared a look.

“I'll keep working on it,” the former smirked with a little shake of his head.

Warmth bloomed in Richie's chest. It was small moments like these, where Eddie alluded to how he had every intention of sticking around, of staying with Richie and all his... *Richieness* , that no amount of what-ifs or second-guessing or marriage-fantasies-gone wrong could ever abolish.

As Rosalita gently pushed them together, so they stood side by side in their matching suits, their shoulders brushing, Richie took his boyfriend's hand and smiled widely for the camera (Mrs H was old-school), basking in all the wonderful things he already had.

He didn't need to put a ring on it. Even if deep down, a part of him, that thirteen-year-old version of him that had flinched away from words like *faggot* and *flamer-cock*, who had once felt so alone, and unlovable, still yearned to.

As if reading his thoughts, Eddie squeezed his hand, prompting him to look up.

Distantly, he heard the shutter-click of a camera as their eyes met.

Yeah. This. Just Eddie and his Eddieness, was all Richie would ever need.

~*~

They made it to the hotel in twenty-five minutes, which, for the time and area, had to be some sort of record.

Then again, the way Eddie drove, Richie couldn't say he was exactly surprised.

And a little turned on.

"This isn't *Driving Miss Daisy* , asshole! Merge already!"

Yeah. Richie was at least 69% percent turned on.

He could almost hear the exasperated groans of the other Losers at his admittedly terrible joke. But fuck 'em. He was always a little off his game whenever Eddie was in full-on-Road-Rage-mode. Which was pretty much every time they were in any moving vehicle. Theirs or otherwise.

It had gotten to the point that Richie had almost developed a Pavlovian response to a horn.

Ha, horn.

He smirked to himself, amused at his own immaturity as Eddie pulled into one of the reserved spaces for wedding guests.

“Fuckin’ idiot must have gotten his license out of a cereal box,” he was growling under his breath in a way that always had Richie suppressing a shiver.

“Uh-huh,” he forced himself to reply, knowing he was being suspiciously quiet.

Eddie turned to him, narrow eyes scanning him.

“No. Oh no,” he warned, pointing a finger in Richie’s face, “I know that look, Tozier. *Do not* be giving me bedroom eyes right now. We don’t have time.”

Richie flashed him a wolfish grin, reaching across to the driver's seat and sliding his palm up Eddie’s thigh, “The wedding doesn’t start for *two hours* , Eds. That’s plenty of time to—”

“We are not messing up these suits, Richard. So keep it in your pants.”

He didn’t push Richie’s hand off, though.

Instead, he entwined their fingers, pressing his hand harder down on his thigh.

“ *Fuck* , you look *good* though,” he hissed, gaze raking up and down the length of Richie’s body like he wanted to devour him, squeezing his fingers tightly, “I’m gonna have *a lot* of fun taking all that off you later.”

Richie had to close his eyes to try and control his laboured breathing.

“That a promise?”

“I swear,” Eddie replied, his voice tight.

“Blood oath?” Richie joked with an outstretched palm, opening his eyes again to find a blazing stare directed right at him.

“I’ll do you one better.”

Eddie leapt across the console, hiking down the collar of Richie’s shirt to nip at the truly impressive hickey he had decorated his neck with the previous night.

(He had been careful to keep it low enough that it was hidden by Richie’s shirt though, because: “ *Think of the pictures, Rich. I’m not having Ben and Bev looking back through their wedding album only to see you looking like you got punched in the throat by Mike Tyson.*”)

“Fuckin’ biter,” Richie groaned as his eyes rolled back into his skull, his tone tinged with awe, his dick twitching with far too much interest for someone who had to go be a reasonably respectable person for the next few hours.

“Hmm,” Eddie mouthed against his skin, his tongue darting out to salve the sting of pain his teeth had caused before giving it a tiny peck, barely a brush of lips but full of promise, and sitting back, reaching up to fix the skewed collar back in place.

They stared at one another as their breathing slowed, Eddie’s pupils blown so wide the entirety of his eyes looked black.

“Get the fuck outta the car, Tozier. We’re gonna be late.”

With that, he shoved the driver’s door open and stepped out, slamming it hard behind him, as if he wasn’t 100% the cause of the delay in the first place.

Richie let out an exasperated moan, his head thumping against the head-rest as he mentally scolded his dick *and* his dick of a boyfriend for all the blood currently being drained from his brain.

“Okay, get your shit together, Trashmouth,” he spoke to his reflection in the rear-view mirror, “Go be the best Man of Honour Beverly Marsh could ever ask for. She deserves it.”

With one last breath, he opened the car door and stood out, meeting Eddie’s gaze over the top of the roof.

“After you, Best Man.”

~*~

The hotel looked...breathtaking, adorned with little touches of Bev and Ben’s personality and tastes that melded together, complementing each other, in a simple, but beautiful way. It wasn’t extravagant, or over the top, but just...them.

The room where the ceremony was to take place, was small, intimate,

for only their nearest and dearest. Rows of seats decorated with emerald and ivory ribbons lined the floor on either side of a white walk-way decked with flower petals, the end that was slightly risen serving as the altar. At the very top, stood two exquisite lanterns, that when lit, would bask the couple in a warm glow.

Richie and Eddie paused a moment to take it all in.

“Wow.”

“Yeah.”

After a beat, they turned to one another.

“See ya up there?” Eddie asked, small smile on his face as he took a step towards Ben’s dressing area.

“Yeah,” Richie murmured quietly, his heart hammering at the idea of standing on an altar (of-sorts) with Eddie Kaspbrak, “See ya up there.”

Eddie surged up to peck his lips quickly before nodding, taking off to the right in his little white-person-shuffle.

Richie watched him go for moment before shaking his head and straightening his shoulders.

He was in Man of Honour mode now.

Turning to his left, he steadily made his way towards the door at the edge of the room, his blood thrumming with excitement at what he'd find behind there. Half a foot away, he halted, taking a deep breath and slowly raising his hand to knock.

"...Come in," a muffled voice called from behind it.

Richie didn't need telling twice, turning the handle and quickly spilling his lanky limbs over the threshold, feeling as if he would burst if he waited any longer.

He stopped dead in his tracks.

There, sitting in front of a large mirror, sat the most beautiful woman he had ever seen. Jade eyes rose, meeting his in the reflection, a large smile breaking out on her stunning face.

"Hey, Rich," Bev beamed, radiating joy as she swept that *winter fire* hair behind one ear.

"Hey Bev," Richie grinned back, not caring that his eyes were already stinging with unshed tears, "God, you look beautiful. Ben is gonna shit himself."

The two friends burst out laughing, much to the confusion of Beverly's aunt who was on the other side of the room, fussing over the veil that Richie knew for a fact Bev had been refusing to let near her ever since it had been suggested. Something about being forced to wear one the first time around, *so thanks, no thanks*.

"Knew I could count on you to tell it how it is, Trashmouth," she grinned, standing up from the mirror and walking towards him.

"Oh yeah, trust me Marsh," Richie snorted, drinking in the vision that was Bev in the cream, figure-hugging dress, "When Ben sees you, forget postcards, he's gonna write you an entire fuckin' anthology of poetry."

He nodded and smiled his hellos at Martha, Bev's aunt, before reaching out, taking Bev's hand and gently spinning her, watching with a grin as her hair bounced in time with her dress swishing.

January embers , indeed. Richie vowed never to make fun of Ben's not-quite-a-haiku again.

"What makes you think he hasn't already?" She asked, her eyes alight with mirth as she inspected his pocket square.

"Wouldn't put it past that sappy Loser," he smirked, wincing as he failed to dodge her punch to his shoulder.

"You're one to talk Mr I-Carved-Mine-and-Eddie's-Initials-on-The-

Kissing-Bridge-When-I-Was-Thirteen.”

He smiled as he remembered the look on Eddie’s face when Richie finally told him about it, about six weeks into their new relationship.

(“I rode my bike by there every day, Rich! I—I saw it. Always wondered...fuck. That R + E was really us?!”)

He threatened to drag Richie back to Derry so he could see the evidence for himself. But was plicated when Richie produced a slightly blurry picture he had taken on his phone after he touched it up following Eddie’s death. He had wanted to remember how it looked, their initials together, linked by a +, forever connecting them in a way Richie thought they would never get to be.

Eddie had held him extra tight that night, as if he could ward away all the grief and pain Richie had felt both times his knife had scraped against that wood.

And somehow, he did. Richie hadn’t had any nightmares that night. Or for many nights afterward.

“Touché,” he replied with a tilt of his head before clapping his hands and rubbing them together, “Alright, Marsh. Man of Honour, reporting for duty. What needs doing? Who do I need to yell at like the D-List celebrity I am?”

Bev rolled her eyes, turning back to the vanity, snatching up a

necklace and holding it out for him to take, "Come on, Rich. Don't sell yourself short. You gotta be at least C-List now."

Richie scoffed as she turned around, brushing back her hair. Gently, he lowered the necklace down over her and closed the clasp, his fingers fumbling only a little.

"There. Your something old, safe and sound," he murmured as she turned back around.

She smiled at him, absentmindedly tracing her fingers over her mom's locket.

"You bring my something blue?" She asked, mischief wrinkling her nose.

Richie flushed, throwing a quick glance to her aunt, who took that moment to flounce into the en-suite, snapping the door closed behind her, veil in hand to try, "*Steam the wrinkles out of this wretched thing!*"

The two friends waited a beat before Beverly started gesticulating to hurry up already. With a grumble, Richie inwardly cursed his friend as he shoved his hand in his pocket and produced the offending blue material, practically shoving it in her hand.

"I'm not helping you put *that* on," he announced as she took the garter from him with a wink and began hiking up the edge of her dress, causing Richie to whirl around in a panic.

“Don’t worry, Rich. I wouldn’t want Eddie to get jealous,” she replied, leer evident in her tone, even if he couldn’t see her teasing face.

“Yeah,” Richie gave a dry laugh, “Eds found it in my jacket pocket the other day. *That* was a fun conversation.”

Bev let out a booming laugh, “Shit, Rich, sorry. But you knew what you were signing up for when you agreed to be my Man of Honour.”

“I did,” he smiled, chuckling at the memory of him hastily trying to explain to a perplexed Eddie, bunched up garter in hand, only for Eddie to let out a laugh, assuring him that infidelity never crossed his mind, but rather, he thought Richie wanted to try *something new* in the bedroom.

Something which, apparently, Eddie wouldn’t be opposed to.

So, it was a win-win for everyone.

“Okay, I’m done. Your modesty is intact, Mr Tozier.”

He turned back around to see his friend fixing the end of her dress before straightening up, flashing him another smirk.

“So, you taking notes for when it’s your turn?”

Richie frowned, “My turn for what?”

“To wear a dress,” she deadpanned sarcastically, rolling her eyes at his bewilderment, “*to get married*, idiot.”

Heat rose on his cheeks.

“What—no, me and Eddie—”

“Have been in love with each other for forever,” Bev cut across him briskly, one eyebrow raised, “come on, Richie. You tellin’ me you’ve never even *thought* about it?”

He shrugged, unable to look her in the eye as he grumbled, “It’s...we haven’t been dating a full year yet, Bev. And Eds...he’s done all this before. Has barely been divorced two years—”

“I was only divorced ten months when Ben proposed to me.”

Richie didn’t know what to say to that.

Bev looked triumphant.

As if that settled the matter.

“Okay, and back to why we’re here,” he clapped his hands, adopting a variation of his British guy voice, that had in his opinion (and nobody else’s), improved over the years.

“Necklace and garter are fastened. What else does this Man of Honour need to help you accomplish before you book it up that aisle, Ms Marsh?”

She threw him a look that told him she knew a brush-off when she heard one, but clearly had bigger fish to fry. Still, Richie knew that the conversation was by no means over, just...on hold.

“Well, British Richie,” she hummed, ticking off on her fingers, “I need you to start assembling the rest of the Losers, give the dining hall a quick once over, make sure that Ben’s assistant isn’t sat next to her ex from accounting, and oh—check in on Ben and Eddie, make sure nobody is hyperventilating.”

Richie’s eyebrows shot up, “You kidding, Marsh? Ben has been waiting forever to marry you. He’s as cool as a cucumber right now.”

“Yeah...I was talking about Eddie.”

Richie let out a snort, silently conceding she had a point. He had

caught him practically wearing a hole in the floor from all his pacing as he went over his Best Man speech last week.

Which had Richie wondering about the person actually getting married. He glanced up, seeing Bev staring off into the distance a little, a complicated look on her face.

He leaned down, gently placing his hands on Bev's shoulders, catching her eye.

"You good, Marsh?"

Beverly shook herself, a small smile beginning to form back on her face.

"Yeah, yeah, I'm good. I just...I was thinking that I really wish my mom was here. You know, to see me marry the man I *actually* love..." she trailed off, fingers brushing the locket, her engagement ring glinting against the light.

"It's just, last time, Tom's mom and sisters didn't let me have a minute of peace to myself and—and I didn't get to think about her all day. And then I felt bad, that I didn't. But today...today I've been able to breathe and just *think* about her. About what she would think about all of this. And I know she would have *loved* Ben."

She sounded sad, but also so, so happy that it made Richie's heart clench in his chest.

“Yeah, she would have. Ben’s a good one,” he smiled gently, “and she would be so happy for you, Bev. So proud of the woman you’ve become, everything you survived to get here today. Not to mention your kickass job, dream house and cutest dog alive. You’re the human embodiment of 100 emoji, girl.”

Beverly gave a watery laugh, shoving him with not an inconsiderable amount of force.

“You’re such an idiot. I love you.”

Richie nudged her chin softly, “Love you too, Loser.”

She took a deep breath, letting it out in a rush before shaking herself, smile growing larger, “Okay, off you go, Man of Honour. Duty calls.”

She shooed him teasingly before enveloping him in a quick hug, mumbling into his ear, “You owe me a dance, later. Just like in the old days, when you’d stand on my feet in the Clubhouse.”

Richie chuckled, “You got it, boss. Won’t be long.”

With that, he turned on his heel, throwing her a thumbs up over his shoulder before stepping out into the corridor and closing the door behind him with a snap.

Now, onto his next task...

Losers, assemble!

~*~

Luckily for Richie, none of The Losers Club were particularly inconspicuous. On the second floor, he found both Bill and Mike laughing heartily outside what must have been one of their rooms.

“What up, ding-dongs? What’s so funny?”

The two men turned in unison, twin grins on their faces as they exclaimed, “Trashmouth!”

Richie dodged Bill’s attempt at a noogie, accepting Mike’s warm hug instead.

“You guys been pre-gaming?” He asked suspiciously, chin pressed to Mike’s shoulder as he eyed the floor for any evidence of empty glasses.

Mike snorted, “Nah, man. Stan just gave us this old photo album that his mom found in their old storage locker from Derry and—look!”

Richie accepted the leather book, eyes scanning it, mouth dropping open when he saw what lay inside. Dozens and dozens of pages were

chock full of pictures of Stan from about kindergarten age and upwards.

“Holy shit, look at lil Stan the Man. Those luscious locks!” He gaped, drinking in the downright adorable toddler, beginning to flick through the pages.

“Wait for it...” Bill sing-songed mysteriously.

Richie flicked to the next page and nearly dropped the book altogether.

“Bingo!” Mike laughed.

Richie stared down at the picture. It was all of them, the seven members of the Losers Club, posing just outside their Clubhouse, dumb shower caps on their heads, each one beaming at the camera. His eyes caught on his younger self, who was holding up bunny ears behind Eddie’s head.

“Forgot Stan had that camera with the timer,” Mike remarked warmly, leaning over Richie to get another look at the photo.

“There’s loads of them in there. From sleepovers, the quarry, the Aladdin. There’s even some old-school selfies in there too. Ya know, where most of us are only half in frame—it’s gold.”

Well, that solves the mystery of who took the picture of me and Eds that's hung up in Ben and Bev's hallway...

Richie kept flicking through the pages, eyes hungrily drinking in all the dumb photos like a parched man.

His gaze stalled on one in particular.

It was of Ben and Bev, the latter clearly the instigator, arm outstretched awkwardly in an effort to get them both in the picture. She mostly succeeded, just slightly cutting off the edge of Ben's left ear.

"I bet you a hundred bucks when Ben sees this, he'll cry like a baby," he laughed, shaking his head at the obviously love-struck expression on thirteen-year-old Ben as he looked at Bev, not at the camera.

Riiiiight. Because you were so much better around Eddie, hypocrite.

"Oh no, I've already lost enough of my hard-earned cash thanks to one of your bets and Eddie finally figuring out how to shut you up," Mike held up his hands in surrender.

Richie winked at him, "Not my fault that Eds finds me irresistible, Mikey."

"Not sure Eddie would agree with that assessment," Bill snorted.

Before Richie could retort, Mike glanced at his watch, “Shit, gotta go get Stan and Patty. Meet you guys in the lobby.”

Richie and Bill watched Mike go for a beat before Richie elbowed his friend, “What about you, Mr-Best-Selling-Author? You gotta be flushed with that new movie deal in the works, right?”

Bill rolled his eyes, stepping a little closer to look at the album that Richie was still flipping through.

“For what it’s worth, Rich. That bet was one I was happy to lose.”

Richie glanced up to find his old friend already looking at him, sincerity on his face.

“Thanks, Bill,” he murmured softly in reply, warmth spreading in his chest.

“You and Eddie...you’re the real deal. Always have been,” Bill continued, glancing back down to the pictures, “Looking back on these, I don’t know how I missed it.”

Richie snorted, seeing what he meant. He had stopped on a picture of the four of them, Bill, Stan, Richie and Eddie when they were in sixth grade. The former two were normal, arms thrown over each other’s shoulders and smiling for the camera, but the latter two were a

different story—Eddie, his face screwed up tight, clearly mid-laugh, his head thrown back, and Richie, his gaze on Eddie, his eyes dancing brightly behind his glasses.

See? Ben wasn't the only love-struck one.

“Yeah...I wasn't exactly subtle, was I?” He marveled, wondering how he didn't get his ass beat even more by Bowers & Co if he had apparently wandered around with super-gay-heart-eyes for his male best friend all day long.

“Nah, you weren't too obvious, Rich. Only to those who knew you. And honestly, even then, you hid it well.”

A hand landed on his shoulder, squeezing gently.

“I just wish you hadn't had to.”

Richie's throat burned as he swallowed around the emotion that had welled up in it.

“Me too, Billy boy. But when I was with you guys, it wasn't all that bad, I promise.”

Bill nodded, offering him a ghost of a smile.

“So, what’s the next duty on your Man of Honour list?”

~*~

The dining hall was just as gorgeous as the ceremony room. Ten circular tables decorated with the emerald and ivory color scheme, complemented with floral centerpieces and shining silverware adorned three-quarters of it, with the last quarter serving as a spacious dance floor.

Richie scanned each table, making sure each name was in its proper place, double-checking that the assistant (whose name was scrawled messily on the back of his hand) wasn’t stuck with her ex, when an odd name crossed his path.

James Dean.

Something tugged at the back of his brain for a split second before he snorted, calling over his shoulder, “Hey Bill, you see Ben has a dead movie star for a friend? Looks like us lowly comedians and writers have been officially upstaged.”

When Bill didn’t reply, Richie turned on his heel, his brow furrowing when he saw his friend at the edge of the room, staring and nodding intently at Eddie who was, as usual, gesturing wildly.

“Eds!” he called out, making his way towards them, “What’s up, shouldn’t you be like, buffing the rings or whatever the fuck a Best

Man does?”

“The officiant is running late,” a new voice replied instead.

Richie’s eyebrows climbed up his forehead as Ben appeared from behind him.

There was no doubt about it. The man looked... *hot* .

Like, not *Eddie hot* obviously, Richie didn’t wanna rip his clothes off or anything, but still, like all those Italian soccer players and their WAGs had babies that grew up to be GQ models, who then banged each other and popped out Ben, kinda hot. Standing there in his tailored, black suit with emerald tie and waistcoat, he was third-generation hot.

It really wasn’t fair.

‘Grew into my looks,’ my ass, Bev.

“Shit, people are gonna start arriving in like, twenty minutes,” Ben mumbled worriedly, glancing at his watch as if time would somehow freeze Zack-Morris-Style.

“Okay, so, we just stall for a bit,” Bill nodded in that take-charge voice of his that was always a comfort, “The crowd can’t get restless if they’re not bored.”

Richie frowned, “Yeah, but, how do we stall?”

A beat of silence passed between them before Eddie piped up, his voice dripping with sarcasm, “Gee, if only we knew someone who made a living out of *entertaining people*...”

“Yeah but, I don’t think everyone will be down for one of Bill’s book readings, Eds. Kinda a weird genre for a wedd—”

“ *Richie* .”

“Ugh,” he groaned, accepting that his evasion wasn’t working.

Three pairs of eyes bore into him, but it was Ben’s that were the worst.

Fucking puppy-dog-eyes too?! Goddamn him. I’m only human.

“Fine, fine, I’ll...I’ll improv or something, free-style it,” he muttered, rubbing his forehead with his palm, “Fuck, this was a really dumb time for me to take a break from writing.”

“You’ll figure it out,” Eddie said with more confidence than Richie ever felt, shoving him back towards Bev’s dressing room, “But first, be a good Maid of Honour and go tell the Bride she has some extra

time to practice her vows.”

“ *Man of Honour* ,” Richie corrected snarkily, slapping Eddie’s hands off him where they were resting very distractingly low on his back. Now was not the time for him to get a semi.

“That’s the spirit. Work that into your set,” his boyfriend smirked before shoving him at the door and booking it back out of the room with a speed that never failed to astound Richie, considering his short legs.

Heaving a sigh, Richie raised his hand to knock.

~*~

Beverly Marsh really was the chilliest bride to ever exist.

Upon hearing that their officiant was stuck in traffic and would be at least half an hour late, she merely shrugged and started quizzing Richie on his impromptu stand up routine.

“So, what, you’re just gonna wing it?” She asked breezily, sounding as if she had every confidence in him.

Which made one of them, he supposed.

“Uh, I suppose? I mean, can’t do my usual crowd riffing, I guess. Hardly wedding-appropriate. They don’t call me Trashmouth for nothin’, Marsh,”

Bev snorted, “I know. We called you it first, remember?”

That...gave him an idea.

He leapt forward, planting a kiss into her hair, careful not to mess it up.

“Bev, you beautiful genius. I know what I’ll talk about.”

She smiled, “I trust you, Loser. As long as you don’t mention my uncle Jerry’s giant forehead, you’re golden.”

Richie scoffed, gesturing to his own five-head, “What. Like I’m one to talk?”

~*~

The place filled up about as fast as one of Richie’s shows, which Eddie supposed was only fitting for the situation. Beside him, he could feel Ben shifting his weight nervously from foot to foot.

“Officiant is fifteen minutes out, so we’re not too off-schedule,” he grumbled, more to himself than anyone else.

Eddie reached up and squeezed his shoulder in what he hoped was a reassuring way.

“Don’t worry, Ben. Rich will do what he does best—talk. And before you know it, you’ll be standing at the top of that alter, watching as the love of your life walks towards you. And nothing else will matter. Except her.”

The irony of Eddie of all people telling Ben not to worry, was not lost on him. In fact, it caused him to question, not for the first time, why exactly, out of all the available Losers, that Ben chose *him* as his Best Man. Surely, Mike’s calming presence would have been better, or Stan’s level-headedness, or Bill’s ability to make everything work out—all of these qualities would have been better for a Best Man to have.

And yet, Ben chose him. Anxious, neurotic, Eddie Kaspbrak.

“Thanks, Eddie,” his friend smiled warmly at him, “Knew I could count on you.”

When Eddie tilted his head at him, Ben shrugged, “You just, have this way about you, man. Even as a kid when you were ranting or spiraling, I listened to you. And when you were calm, sincere, you just...had a way of helping me sort things out in my head. Keeping me grounded even when things were crazy. And I...need that today.”

Eddie blinked.

“Don’t get me wrong,” Ben held up his hands, I’m not nervous. At all. I—I’ve waited thirty years for this. But, because it’s been such a long time coming, I’m worried about how it can be messed up, you know? How the world could possibly flip us off one more time.”

Ben nudged Eddie’s shoulder, “But I know you. I know you have thought about every possible scenario and have come up with a contingency. Just like you did with Richie. I knew I could rely on you to see the potential risks and act accordingly,” he paused, looking pensive.

“But it wasn’t just that. You...you were always being told what to do, Eddie. Were always told you couldn’t do that, couldn’t go here, couldn’t hang out with those people, but you did anyway. I always admired that. You were defiant against the odds in the best way, scared out of your mind like we all were. But you were still one of the bravest of us. And I needed that today too.”

Eddie felt the sting of tears behind his eyes, the warmth of affection blooming in his stomach.

God, he *loved* his friends. His true family.

He reached out and gave Ben a tight hug, pouring everything he couldn’t say into it.

“I’m so proud of you guys. You...you and Bev, you’ve been through so much and now you get to be happy. That’s all I’ve ever wanted for you. You deserve it. And anything else that happens today, we’ll face it. We killed a demonic, murderous alien, for fuck’s sake. I think we can handle a little traffic.”

Ben let out a breath of air, halfway between a laugh and a sigh of relief, just as Richie shuffled onto the altar heading straight for the microphone.

He clapped his hand onto Eddie’s shoulder, squeezing it gently as Richie stepped up to the mic.

“Uh hi, everyone, I’m Richie Tozier, and no, Ben and Bev didn’t hire a comedian to do the ceremony, don’t worry, they’re not *those kinda people*— and even if they were, the couldn’t afford me—”

A wave of chuckles met that.

Eddie felt something inside him loosen.

“I kid, I kid, but things *are* running a bit late, so, as the appointed Man of Honour, it is my duty to entertain the troops. Uh, crowd? Audience? Guests!” He snapped his fingers, stepping across the alter, “God, I’ve clearly been in the biz too long and have *not* been to many of *these things*,” he paused, raising his eyebrows, gesturing to himself, “I know, I know, right? Imagine, *this guy*, the one nicknamed ‘Trashmouth Tozier’ who’s notorious for puking off stage and

forgetting his set, *is not* invited to many events dubbed the happiest day of people's lives. It's like they *don't* want me to get drunk and do my Hugh Grant from Four Weddings and a Funeral impression. Who woulda thunk it."

He paused again, before winking conspiratorially, "And don't worry folks, *that will* come later."

Louder laughter followed that.

"Speaking of Trashmouth, I don't think I've ever told anyone how I got that cute little nickname," he paused, and Eddie felt his eyes catch his, even from all the way across the room.

He winked again. This time, just for Eddie.

"See, me, Bev and Ben, we all grew up together in the best decade of all - the eighties. A time where people thought rotary phones were the pinnacle of technology, parachute pants were the height of fashion, and George Michael was as straight as Rock Hudson."

Eddie chuckled as Richie gave a dramatic gasp, "I know, I know, hard to believe such a time existed, but bear with me. Now, those of you who don't know, we were the unfortunate kids that were dragged up among vegetable patches, casual racism, not-so-casual racism, homophobia and corn fields. Not like these Beverly Hills types with their cell phones, chai lattes, equality marches and RuPaul's Drag Race."

Several titters broke out among a group of younger women who clearly worked for Bev.

“We were *deprived* , okay. Bored as shit most of the time. But at least we were together, our little group, the self-entitled Loser’s Club. I know, not the most original, but hey, find me a thirteen year old who is. Excluding all those little shits that are on *Ellen* , how the hell does she even find—I’m getting off topic— *anyway* —”

Yeah, Eddie couldn’t help but remember why Richie so tightly scripted himself. His brain went at a hundred miles an hour most of the time, and Eddie had never realised just how difficult it must be for him not to go off on tangents mid-way through his set, but he was starting to get an idea now.

The guests seemed to revel in it through, like they were getting some sort of special insight into Richie’s past, if their constant stream of chuckles was any indication.

“The Losers Club - Bev, Ben, Bill—parents clearly had boners for B-names back then—Mike, Stan, Eddie and yours truly, we made our own entertainment. And...surprise surprise, mine was more often than not, terrible impressions, off-colour remarks, and my ultimate favourite - the always classic, “Your mom” joke.

Eddie paled.

Oh no he isn’t.

“This joke was nearly always aimed at my favourite little hypochondriac, Eddie Kaspbrak—”

Oh yes he is.

I'm gonna fucking kill him.

Richie looked over to him again, only this time, waved his arms like one of those giant, inflatable tube guys, calling out, “Eddie my love, give the audience—crowd— *guests* —a wave.”

Eddie glared at him, not moving an inch.

“There he is, ladies and gents, right at the back of the room, the short, sexy brunet who’s looking at me like he’s gonna strangle me with this microphone cord any second now. That’s *him* . The little shit who called me ‘Trashmouth’ for the first time and somehow got it to stick. And the rest, as they say, is history.”

He tilted his head, eyes catching Eddie’s again, “So, yeah, you’ve little, baby Eds, with his fanny-pack, second fanny-pack and undiagnosed ADHD to thank for my entire schtick, really. I’m sure you’re all very grateful. But not as grateful as you’ll all be when we can finally get this show on the road, huh?”

As soft murmurs broke out, Richie looked out into the crowd, clearly drinking them in, cogs turning in his brain.

“Now, I know what you’re thinking,” he paused, putting on a nasally voice, mimicking the type of woman who’d unironically say, ‘I want to speak to your manager,’—“Shouldn’t he be talking about Ben and Bev? It’s their Big Day, capital B, capital D, after all. But here’s the thing, I’ll level with ya.”

He leaned into the microphone, cupping it with his palm, stage-whispering out of the side of his mouth, “I’ve prepared an absolutely baller Man of Honour speech. And I’m a zero spoilers kinda guy. Seriously, I’m like five seasons behind on Game of Thrones and I still get mad when Eddie tries to bring up the Red Wedd—and nope, no. Won’t mention that today. No good, very bad luck, Bev will not appreciate me talking about genocide at all, even the fictional kind, so...where was I?”

He paused dramatically, tapping his chin.

Eddie rolled his eyes at his theatrics.

The audience—guests— *shit, now he has me doing it* , seemed to like it though, a buzz of laughter and murmurs breaking out.

“Ah, yes, my speech. My pièce de résistance. Not to be my own hype guy, or anything, but, it’s a doozy. You’ll laugh, you’ll cry, some of you, may even di—no, nobody will die, Jesus, there I go again, I’m almost as bad as George R.R. himself, dammit—”

The guests’ laughter was so infectious by now that Eddie’s almost

forgot to be mad.

“But yeah, bottom line, that’s all to come folks. So that’s why I’m up here now, talkin’ out my ass and not reciting meticulously crafted, heart-felt words. Shit, I don’t even know if I’ll be doing that later either, but guess we’ll see,” he tapped nose before crossing his fingers.

Out of the corner of his eye, Eddie saw Stan signal to Richie that the officiant had arrived.

“And that’s my cue, everybody. The wedding person, uh, priest, pastor, shaman, witch-doctor, whatever—did I mention I haven’t been to many weddings?—has emerged victorious from Los Angeles traffic so this day can proceed as normal. Well, not normal exactly. Anyone who has me as a friend is definitely a few pickles short of a Big Mac, but you know what I mean. I’ll shut my trap, leave the trash talkin’ for later. For now, let’s get these assholes wed!”

The guests gave a chorus of applause and whoops and more laughter like they were an actual audience as Richie high-tailed it to the side of the alter, towards where Bev was. Eddie watched him go, pride settling warmly in his stomach.

He’d probably never admit it, but Richie really was the funniest person he had ever known.

And a whole host of other things, too.

But he *would* happily admit those. Just in the privacy of their own bed, under the cloak of darkness, preferably with Richie's mouth on his dic—

“Shit. Okay. It's time.”

Eddie shook his head, scolding himself for drifting off and turned his attention to Ben, jaw set in determination but a smile lighting his eyes.

“Okay, you heard the Man of Honour. Let's get you wed!”

Notes for the Chapter:

Nearly there ;) Would love to know what you think of this surprise epilogue that I legit had no idea would get this in depth lol. And my disastrous attempt at “stand up” *cringe*

7. Penny-Wise, Pound-Foolish - A Cautionary Tale by Richard Tozier and Edward Kaspbrak

Notes for the Chapter:

Okay, here's the thing. I'm a dirty, rotten liar. This epilogue is in three parts. My bad. But, bright side...smut to come? Richie and Eddie too ;)

He heard her before he saw her.

Her voice, quiet and melodic, wafted up the corridor, toward him.

As he neared, she must have sensed him, because she turned, her cream, figure-hugging dress (a Beverly Marsh original) with the sweet-heart neckline and emerald-belt (Richie had binged some *Say Yes To The Dress* to prepare for the occasion) swishing with a flourish, her winter fire hair bouncing in time, beach-waved and sans veil.

Richie had never seen her smile so brightly.

“Hey.”

“Hey.”

A beat, or perhaps the last twenty-nine years, passed between them. Everything they and their friends had endured, had lost, had found again, just to make it to here, to this exact moment, together.

“You ready, Marsh?” He asked, already knowing the answer.

“Born ready, Tozier.”

He chuckled, watching as Bev and her aunt shared a smile, linking arms.

“You got this, Molly Ringwald,” he winked as the trio stopped adjacent to the doors, hidden from view from those inside.

“Right back at ya, Ally Sheedy.”

He clutched his chest, before tilting his head, “Eh. I’ll take it.”

They shared a chuckle, before Bev’s aunt began positioning them front and centre of the double doors.

“And that’s my cue. Knock ‘em dead, Red. See ya up there!” Richie exclaimed, bouncing on the balls of his feet before leaning down and brushing his lips against her forehead.

She tilted her chin, beaming up at him, her eyes shimmery.

“See ya up there.”

With one last year glance over his shoulder, taking in the absolute vision his friend made, Richie threw her a double-thumbs-up and bolted back through the side door, quickly and quietly making his way to the top of the room, to take his place at the altar.

Almost on autopilot, he met a dark, warm gaze, his stomach fluttering at the sight. He gave Eddie his warmest smile and a cheeky wink as he halted across from him on the other side of the officiant, who was deep in conversation with Ben.

As the minutes ticked by, Richie fought the urge to loosen the tie around his neck, highly aware of Eddie's presence across the altar, right in his direct eye-line, which, in his opinion, was frankly poor-planning because *how the hell* was he was expected to pay full attention when Eddie was right there, *looking like that*.

It should've been illegal.

With Herculean effort, he somehow managed not to openly drool over his unfairly sexy boyfriend and instead focused his gaze out into the room, eyes trailing over the rest of the Losers - Bill, Mike and Stan, who were serving as groomsmen, showing guests to their seats.

Damn, everybody cleans up good. Stupid, sexy friends!

His roaming eyes then caught on the lanterns that adorned the altar,

admiring the glow their candles gave off, adding to the ambiance. It really was stunning. Something he could even see himself—

Nope. No. No more wedding thoughts, Tozier.

At the bachelor/ette party, (which was really more of a group hang with a dash of debauchery as all the Losers, Bev included, just went out and got blasted together,) when he and Bev were knocking back tequila like it was going out of style, the bride-to-be did briefly entertain the idea of having Richie and Eddie walk up the aisle together, like a traditional Maid of Honour and Best Man would, but Richie very quickly vetoed that idea.

“Nope, no way, I love ya, Bev, but that’s not happening.”

The idea of walking up the aisle arm-in-arm with a tuxedoed Eddie Kasprak at a wedding ceremony was just...too much.

She must have read something in his face, his tone, his body language, or his fucking aura—because she didn’t push it. Instead, she countered that both Eddie and Richie would stand at the altar with Ben, Richie perched in wait to hold Bev’s bouquet for her and Eddie stationed beside Ben, taking care of the rings.

What Richie failed to realise in his tequila-induced-stupor however, was just how this would put him directly opposite the love of his life in the most romantic setting ever, for an extended period of time.

This did not seem to help his recent marital notions in the slightest.

Neither did the enigmatic expression on Eddie's face. Because naturally, Richie's gaze migrated back to him after only a few moments. When their eyes met, Eddie's smile twitched ever so slightly, dark eyes practically dancing against the glow of the lanterns, making Richie's stomach swoop.

God you're such a romantic sap, Tozier. You'll be writing him bad haikus any day now.

Suddenly, Ben and the officiant broke from each other, the former beginning to take his place at the altar. Richie threw him a cheeky thumbs up that had Ben grinning in reply, shaking his head with mirth.

He looked like he was beginning the first day of the rest of his best life.

As Richie watched Ben a moment, he noticed that the groom was now looking over to Eddie who seemed to mouth something at him. Warmth spread in Richie's stomach, whatever Eddie had said caused Ben to beam from ear to ear as he turned to face the door.

Richie's gaze flickered over to Eddie just as soft music began to play.

"Show time," he mouthed.

“Ice fuckwad alright chicken,” Eddie mouthed back.

Okay, so, Richie’s lip-reading clearly needed work.

Still, the softness in Eddie’s face even when he appeared to be mouthing nonsense, never failed to make Richie weak at the knees.

The sound of large, heavy doors opening, dragged his eyes away from the love of his life and instead to one of his best and oldest friends, as she slowly made her way, arm-in-arm with her aunt, up the aisle.

Richie heard Ben gasp and he mentally prepared himself to catch him should he begin to swoon—despite that clearly being Eddie’s job.

“I’m so proud of you, honey,” Martha murmured to her niece as they stopped beside Ben, Bev leaning forward to kiss the older woman’s cheek.

Tears pricked Richie’s eyes as Bev then took that last step forward, her whole face glowing as she smiled at Ben and took his hand, they both turning to face the officiant.

“Ladies and gentlemen, we are gathered here today...”

A tear rolled down his cheek.

Dammit. The seal is broken now. I'm gonna be a fuckin' mess.

~*~

Richie was a fuckin' mess.

And Eddie loved him for it.

He kept alternating between staring at the happy couple and directly over their heads to his equally-happy, yet weeping, boyfriend. Well, weeping was probably a strong word, but his cheeks were definitely blotchy and tear-stained.

Richie had always hated that he was the most emotional one of the group. Even when they were kids, he was always quickest with most feelings—anger, sorrow, frustration. Not that Eddie had been much better, to be fair, he was just better at hiding it. He had to be to live with a mother like his.

Which, probably said more about his mother than it did about him. But that was what he was in therapy for.

Well, one of the reasons, anyway.

Still, even back then, Eddie remembered that there was never a sight

quite like Richie Tozier crying. He hadn't seen it many times throughout their friendship, thankfully, but the handful of times he did remember, had always struck him. There was just something so hurtful and yet, in moments like these when it was happy tears flushing him as red as a tomato, so gorgeous.

Even when snot was involved.

Which, Eddie surmised was only cute and not revolting for him as he was so fucking in love with the lanky, shit-head.

Still, he was grateful that snot was not involved just yet.

But as Ben and Beverly turned to one another and began reciting their vows, Eddie started the snot-countdown in his head, while also ignoring the stinging in his own eyes.

His gaze raked over his friends' faces, the joy contagious as they spoke quietly and intimately, as if they were the only people in the room. Words like crush and laughter, friendship and fun, New Kids, year books and *hearts burning there too* , flowed between them and made Eddie's own heart soar in his chest.

He was just so damn...happy. To be here. With his friends. And the man he now knew to be the love of his life. Alive.

Two years ago, as he lay at the bottom of a dank, disgusting sewer, with a giant, gaping hole in his chest, none of this had seemed

possible. Had even entered his head as being an option for him.

Because he had accepted his death.

And died.

Only to live again.

And witness two of his oldest friends proclaim their love for all to see.

What a world.

His eyes were drawn to Richie, then, their very own gravitational pull, as always.

Richie, who was preoccupied with trying to hold himself together as he watched over their friends like a proud parent, didn't notice Eddie's stare.

It was a rare instance that Eddie got away with openly gazing at Richie, even now. But it had been even harder to do as children. Richie just always seemed to be looking right back at him whenever Eddie's gaze wandered his way, only to then dart away, eyes bugging behind his bottle-neck glasses, flush on his cheeks. Thinking back on it now, Eddie really couldn't understand how had missed all the signs.

Then again, he had been too busy with trying to hide his own.

Through hammock-hogging and squabbling and comic-reading and late-night musing, Eddie took his few and far between moments to truly observe Richie with zeal. And was terrified of getting caught every time. But also, exhilarated by it. He may not have understood why at the time, but the idea of Richie catching him openly staring, made something spark, deep in his gut. A thrill flooding his veins.

Richie's eyes met his.

Warmth sparked deep in his gut. A thrill shot through his veins. Everything and nothing had changed.

Eddie winked, causing a delightful flush to bloom across his boyfriend's face.

Somewhere, thirteen-year-old him was preening.

Richie pulled a truly-ugly face at him, before redirecting his gaze, just in time for the officiant to announce loudly:

"I now pronounce you - husband and wife. You may kiss the bride!"

Richie let out a startling, ear-piercing whistle as the guests gave a

thunderous applause, Mike, Stan and Bill cheering uproariously as Eddie clapped so hard his hands soon went numb. He eagerly watched as the newlyweds laughed and joked and walked confidently back down the aisle, hand-in-hand.

He waited, one beat, then two, before glancing over again.

And yep, just as he thought, there was Richie Tozier, gazing at him with something like shock and wonder.

Slowly, Eddie walked over to him, their eyes glued to each other as he gently reached out and took Richie's hand in his, giving him a short tug towards the aisle.

"Come on, Mr Celebrity. Your catwalk awaits."

~*~

So, here's the thing. Typically, when you walk up an aisle, you then, reasonably, have to walk back down it again.

This, as simple a concept as it was, had not occurred to Richie Tozier when he and Bev outlined his positioning in the wedding party.

Fucking tequila.

Thus, it took him a whole 2.3 seconds, as his boyfriend's warm hand clasped his, to realise that he would in fact, walk hand-in-hand with the love of his life down the aisle.

Just...in the opposite direction.

His heart thundered in his chest all the same.

“Well done, Tozier. You managed to keep it together. Thought for a second that I'd have to break out the man-size Kleenex,” Eddie mumbled, breath hot against his cheek as they made their descent, nodding at the clapping guests.

Richie glared at Bill, Mike, Stan and Patricia as they all gave him knowing looks when they passed by.

“Fuck you, Kaspbrak,” he muttered out of the side of his mouth, not daring to look at him and instead focusing on the short train of Beverley's dress in front of him, making sure it was not trod on or caught on anything.

He took his Man Of Honour duties very seriously, thank you very much.

“ *Fuck youuuuuuuuu !*”

The distant flash of a camera caught Richie mid-hearty-laugh at

Eddie mimicking their dumb exchange back in the Chinese restaurant from Hell, what seemed like a lifetime ago.

Tension loosened in his chest, his brain focusing on the warmth spreading throughout him, eyes watching the cream material like a hawk as it trailed along the floor.

The further they got away from the altar, Richie realised that this walk wasn't so bad, actually.

Just like any other.

With more of an audience and less of the cardio.

Wonder if I could pull a Blue Steel?

"This is going a lot better than my last trip down the aisle," Eddie broke him from his musing with a wry tone.

Tension began building in Richie's chest again.

He was married before and he hated it. He was married before and he hated it. He was married before and—

"Emphasis on 'trip.' I nearly smashed my nose on a pew walking back

down. Should have taken it as a sign, really.”

Richie’s heart clenched.

“Sorry Eds,” he said in lieu of his usual teasing, his brain not cooperating, far too preoccupied with flashes of a fantasy where he and Eddie were walking down a different aisle, matching silver bands on their left hands with Ben and Bev behind them, not in front.

Before Eddie could respond, they reached the end, Ben and Bev taking the lead to head outside, where the photographer was snapping with fervor.

Richie shoved down his pesky feelings, gently squeezing Eddie’s hand before letting it fall as they followed out to the garden.

God, when did I become so pro-marriage all of a sudden? When did the ol’ ball ‘n’ chain, the lust, rust and dust, the dreaded life-sentence, become all I could think about? And everything I ever wanted?

Except, he already knew the answer. Had for a long, long time.

When Eddie Kaspbrak’s lips had met his - Richie Tozier was a goner.

The thing that nobody told you about weddings was...there was *a lot* of downtime.

The break between ceremony and reception was generous, usually. A lot of waiting around as the photographer got artsy pictures of *"Just the happy couple, thanks."* Whatever. Richie got his 'silly' face immortalised for the second group shot and that was the main thing.

Now, Richie headed for the bar.

He had taken barely half a sip of bubbly before a loud voice piped up next to him.

"Gotta say man, I'm a huge fan."

Richie fought the urge to reply Dr-Seuss-style as he turned and met the eyes of a short, barrel-shaped man of about fifty, with unnaturally-white teeth, hair clearly dyed jet-black, a tan that was certainly cosmetically-enhanced, and a Rolex fastened to the wrist of the hand that he had extended.

"Uh, thanks," Richie replied as he shook his hand briefly.

"Don Peretti," the guy who Richie had been fully prepared to refer to as 'Medallion Man' in his head (because he had a sneaking suspicion this guy had one under his shirt), announced as their hands dropped, Richie swiftly picking back up his champagne.

"Richie Tozier," he replied needlessly with a wry smirk and half-assed salute.

'Don' (nowhere near as fun as 'Medallion Man') chuckled at that for some reason.

"And there you go, crackin' jokes. Man, I remember watching you back on Comedy Central. Loved your old set about your girlfriend catching you jackin' it to Martha Stewart re-runs. We've all been there, right?"

Richie gave a tight smile as Don laughed heartily, smacking him on the back.

Out of the corner of his eye, he watched Mike, Bill and Stan, along with another guy he didn't know, congregate at the end of the bar.

Cringing at the memory of that particular joke, ever-relieved to be free of Stuart and his particular brand of 'comedy', Richie forced out, "So how do you know the happy couple?"

Don gave what could have easily been a roll of his eyes, had he not seemingly caught himself at the last second.

"The wife works with Kimberly—"

"Beverly," Richie corrected, actively trying not to let his rising distaste for this man show on his face.

"Right," Don nodded, unfazed, "Anyway, I drew the short-straw for all these shindigs when I signed my soul away on the altar twenty years ago, am I right? *You* know what I'm talking about."

He nudged Richie's shoulder so hard it almost knocked the drink out of his hand, champagne sloshing onto the bar. That seemed to catch the attention of the stranger standing with the Losers, a tall, skinny dude, he looking over and catching Richie's eye briefly.

"Uh, no, actually, I've never been married," Richie responded dryly, mopping up some droplets with a napkin.

Don tilted his head, "Huh, good call. Why buy the cow and all that. Still, thought that girlfriend of yours—"

"I don't have a girlfriend."

He said it too loudly, his voice too thin.

Don however, merely raised his eyebrows.

"But, in your set, she's—"

"A prop for jokes I don't make anymore," Richie cut across him, tired of the conversation already, but not wanting to be too much of a dick, especially considering they now clearly had an audience of skinny guy and the Losers semi-paying attention to them.

"Well whatever the jokes, I like your style, Tozier," Don shrugged, gulping down his own straight-scotch, "You tell it like it is. A real man's man, you know?"

Richie stifled a laugh as he looked over to the end of the bar.

"Well, I *do* like men."

Skinny guy, along with Bill and Mike openly laughed as Richie turned back to Don, who had clearly not caught on to the joke.

Did he not hear me call Eddie sexy multiple times on the altar earlier?

"Hey," Richie tilted his head nonchalantly, "you happen to catch any of my newer stuff, by any chance?"

Don shook his head, "Nah. Not buying into that B.S. Netflix fad. Millennials and their streaming, you know? But I'll catch it whenever it runs on cable."

"Thanks for the support, appreciate it," Richie deadpanned, before his lips twitched, "I think when you get to see it in five years, you'll be

surprised."

The older man blinked, "Oh really? Awesome. More of you stickin' it hard to whiny, piss-babies?"

Richie smiled slowly, thinking of the many, many jokes about his blowjob technique.

"Something like that."

He patted him on the shoulder, before stepping away, knowing that his speech alone would leave nothing to the imagination and Don wouldn't even have to catch anything on Comedy Central. He waited a full three beats before meeting the eyes of his friends and the skinny dude.

They all shared thinly-veiled smirks as Don knocked back his drink and left.

"Oh man," skinny guy cooed, tone tinged with awe, "that was fuckin' hilarious. Poor guy has no idea."

Richie hummed, "Yeah man, it's like they say, never meet your heroes. They end up being super gay."

Skinny guy let out a snort as Stan passed him a glass of champagne.

"This is Barry, Richie. A friend of Ben's."

Richie shook Barry's hand, clinking their glasses together.

"Nice to meet you, Barry."

Barry's grin widened, "For the record, I'm a fan too. But like...definitely of the new stuff."

Richie quirked an eyebrow, "So, the *gay* stuff?"

Colour rose on Barry's cheeks as he smiled a little bashfully, "Haha, yeah. Helped me through a lot, to be honest."

A wave of understanding passed over Richie then.

"Glad it could help," he replied simply, but sincerely.

They small-talked for a few more minutes, the Losers chiming in with well-timed anecdotes about Ben that Barry seemed to revel in, before eventually, it was just he and Richie at the bar, sipping the last of their champagne.

Richie snorted into his glass, "Seriously, I'm ass over heels in love with a guy whose idea of a fun weekend is deep-cleaning the shower and *'Sorting out your mess of a sock drawer, Richie. No wonder they never match.'*"

As was usual when Richie was given any sort of downtime and a listening ear, he turned to his favourite topic of discussion - Eddie Kaspbrak. Complete with his best impression of him, with steadily rising tone and gesticulation aplenty.

Barry seemed to enjoy his lovable ragging, though, if his amused chuckles were anything to go by.

"My boyfriend tries to get me to go on runs. *Me*," he stressed with an exaggerated wave down his lanky, unathletic body, "I think I got about a tenth of a mile past our house before I keeled over."

Richie barked out a laugh, "Yeah, Eddie tried to get me to do a juice-cleanse, once. Was on the crapper for two days. I think I saw God."

Their shoulders shook with mirth at their respective relationships for a moment before Richie sombered, glancing around the room, eyes instinctively seeking Eddie out.

Barry clearly caught this, following his lead.

"Must be uh...interesting, you two being the Best Man and Man of Honour, huh? You get the 'it'll be you next' talk yet?"

Richie's eyebrows shot up as he whirled around, slapping the bar with his hand, "Yeah, dude! Constantly. From everyone. What's with that?"

A knowing glint passed over Barry's eyes.

"Yeah, I got it from my mom, brother, cousin, boss and UPS guy when I was Best Man for my friend last month. Never got nudged so much in my life. Had a giant bruise on my rib before the day was out. So much for subtly."

Richie winced, patting his shoulder gently.

"Sorry, man. Must suck to feel pressured—"

"Oh, I *am* gonna propose," Barry assured him, tone confident, "nothing I wanna do more. I'm just biding my time. We've...we've known each other forever, but only been together about eight months, so. Gotta reign it in a little. Stop sweatin' over all the dumb shit, first."

Richie's heart pounded, his throat suddenly dry.

"I uh...I know exactly what you mean."

A beat passed between them, before Barry shrugged.

"I've always been kinda Penny-Wise, Pound-Foolish."

Richie's blood ran cold as he stood a little straighter.

"You're... *Pennywise* ...?"

"Pound-Foolish, yeah. It was this old saying my grandma had. She was British and had some weird phrases, but that one always stayed with me. She'd used it to criticize my mom when she was penny-pinching too much," Barry waved, turning around to face the dining hall, scanning the crowd.

"Basically, it means when someone is so focused on saving for something small, that they neglect something big. I took it to mean not to sweat the small stuff, or you'll end up missing out on the big stuff."

Huh. Not bad advice.

Richie mirrored his stance, eyes automatically seeking out Eddie again.

"Huh. I thought it was the names of some demonic clown duo," he mumbled, barely suppressing his shudder.

“Oh yeah, Frankie mentioned your Coulrophobia.”

Richie blinked.

Barry smirked.

"Yeah, he told me all about that blind date you guys had at the engagement party, too. Gotta say man, I owe you a lot for fuckin' that up."

~*~

Eddie Kaspbrak was starving.

Ravenous, famished and every other word you could think of for *I haven't eaten since last night and I feel like I could devour a horse's ass through a mailbox* , kinda hungry.

Which, is how he found himself scanning the beautifully-laid tables for breadsticks, bread-rolls, any kinda bread really, to keep him going before they sat down to eat. He was so focused on this task in fact, that he almost missed when someone sitting at one of said tables, called out to him.

“Hey Eddie, long time.”

He whirled around at the voice, eyebrows shooting up his forehead at the familiar face.

“Frankie. Hi.”

He shook his outstretched hand, taking the empty seat offered to him and eagerly snatched up some breadsticks from the basket in front of them.

“You hungry too? Thought it was just me,” Frankie laughed, taking a sip of his water and eyeing Eddie amusingly.

“Yeah,” Eddie forced himself to swallow before replying, lest he spit a shower of bread at him, “didn’t uh...get to eat breakfast before we left, so.”

A slow smile spread across Frankie’s face.

“Yeah, Ben mentioned that you and Richie moved in together a while back.”

Eddie paused, mid-chew.

He reflected on the last time he had seen Frankie. It had been at Ben and Bev’s engagement party, nearly a year ago. He and Richie had

been unceremoniously set up, and seemed to hit it off. Had laughed and joked and stood so close together Eddie was surprised their eyes didn't cross. They had danced and drank and flirted until Eddie was fit to burst.

But then, Frankie went home. Richie giving him a short, and noticeably platonic hug.

Eddie remembered openly gaping at them, not understanding what had happened, why they weren't in one of Ben and Bev's guest rooms fucking each other's brains out when they so clearly looked liked they were going to only a few hours before.

But then, all the Losers sat down in the living room, reminiscing until all but two were left - Eddie and Richie. And truths, both old and new, came to light, right before Eddie pulled his head outta his ass and laid one on Richie like his life depended on it.

All because he had been jealous of Frankie.

God, I'm an asshole.

"Hey man," he piping up, turning to Frankie before he could talk himself out of it, "I uh...I just wanna apologize for how I acted the last time we saw each other. I wasn't the most...polite to you. I was a complete dick, actually. And I'm sorry."

Frankie smirked, giving a one-shouldered shrug, "Well, I *was* flirting

pretty hard with Richie that night, so, I get it.”

Eddie let out a surprised laugh, nodding, “Yeah, you were. But you had every right to. I just...couldn’t handle it like an adult, apparently. Still, that’s no excuse for being shitty, so, you know, sorry.”

Frankie nodded, "Apology accepted."

And with that, came an ease of small-talk that Eddie honestly didn't expect. The two swapped stories back and forth of what they had been up to in the last near-year, both devouring the bread and forcing themselves not to reach for another basket.

"Don't you own a gym? Shouldn't you be smacking carbs outta my hands?" Eddie asked as he nibbled on his *very last breadstick, dammit*.

Frankie chuckled, "Yeah, but we gotta live, man. Can't calorie-count all the time. My boyfriend has gotten me to ease up a little, encourages me to have a few more cheat days, especially on special occasions."

"Sounds like a smart guy."

"Oh yeah, a bonafide genius, but a real smart-ass too."

Eddie snorted, "Richie too. Academically smart, socially stupid, but with undeserved confidence. A straight-A slacker that everyone

flocked to. Used to drive me nuts. Still does sometimes."

Frankie tilted his head at him.

"But you love him anyway."

Eddie caught his eye.

"But I love him anyway."

A small smile spread across Frankie's face.

"Glad to see you two sorted your shit out. Hey, settle something for me," he paused, leaning in to nudge Eddie's shoulder with his, "How long after I left did it take you to kiss him?"

Heat shot up Eddie's neck and directly into his cheeks. He felt like he should be offended, but only found himself shaking his head, small grin on his face.

"About an hour."

A laugh erupted from Frankie, his entire body jolting in his seat.

"Yeah. Thought so."

"Hey, I thought I was supposed to be the funny one?"

Eddie glanced up, seeing Richie standing behind them, a tall, thin man with brown hair and blue eyes accompanying him.

Frankie nudged Eddie, "He always this desperate for approval?"

Eddie smirked. Oh yeah. When he wasn't flirting with the love of his life, Eddie definitely liked Frankie.

"Nah. Sometimes he's asleep."

Both Frankie and Eddie, along with the new guy chuckled as Richie rolled his eyes, "Yeah, yeah, very funny. You shoulda been the comedian, Eds."

Eddie hid his smile behind his glass as Frankie stood up and gave Richie a typical bro-hug, back-slap included.

"Long time, man. How've you been? I see you met Barry."

Richie smiled, "Oh yeah, he was telling me all about you two. Your Star-Crossed love story. Nice to meet the best friend you so badly

pined for and we mutually-bonded over."

Frankie flushed, rolling his eyes and gesturing at Eddie, "Pot meet kettle, Tozier."

As the two sniped back and forth, Eddie took his opportunity to reach between them and extend his hand towards Barry, "I'm Eddie, Richie's better half, nice to meet ya," he smiled, standing up and letting Barry sit back down in his seat.

"Uh, I resent that," Richie cut across before Barry could reply, "We are both equally terrible, Eds. Don't mislead these nice people."

"How do you know we're nice?" Barry piped up, looking up at them with a small smirk on his face, "That seems like a bit of a leap. I mean, him," he waved a hand at Frankie, "I get. You met him and probably knew in five seconds what a lovable shit-head his is. But me, not so much. I could be a cold-blooded killer for all you know."

Richie tilted his head, eyes raking up and down the other man, silently appraising him before shaking his head.

"Nah. I've met cold-blooded killers. And trust me, Barry boy. You ain't one."

Barry raised his eyebrows at Eddie, mouthing what could have been only 'Barry boy', which frankly, was not the most questionable part of Richie's sentence in Eddie's opinion.

In reply, Eddie merely rolled his eyes, gesturing to the bread basket, which was now more ‘basket’ than anything else.

“You eat anything, Rich? You always get a little...weird when you’re hungry.”

A beat passed between the quartet.

“Well, weirder.”

Richie gave a dismissive wave, “Nah. You heard Bev, Eds. She threatened to skewer us like shish-kebabs if we ruin our dinner. And we know your track record with—”

Before Eddie could fully wince at the awful (but not unexpected) inside joke aimed at his unfortunate method of death at the hand, or rather claw, of demonic space clown, Richie broke off, staring at something over Frankie’s shoulder, his eyes bugged out comically-wide.

“Oh my god.”

Frankie went noticeably still as Eddie followed Richie’s eye-line to see what caught his attention.

It was there that his gaze landed on the name card sitting pretty in front of Frankie's plate.

James Dean.

"Holy shit."

Eddie had to agree.

"You—you're—" astoundingly, Richie seemed at a loss for words as he flailed his arms, smacking Eddie on the shoulder as if to ask if he had seen it too, gaping between Frankie and the name card and back again.

"Dude! When you said you went by Frankie, I didn't think that was because you have like, the coolest fucking real name in history!"

Frankie took his turn to roll his eyes at Richie as Barry patted his shoulder sympathetically, "Both me and my dad would have to disagree with you, Tozier."

"Why the fuck didn't you tell me?" Richie sounded wounded, looking to Eddie for sympathy and getting none.

Frankie scoffed, "And give a comedian that kinda ammunition? No fucking way."

Richie attempted to look insulted, but really, it was obvious that the cogs were already turning in his head on how he could possibly work this into his next set, so, proving Frankie's point, really.

Eddie decided now would be a good time to swoop in and save the couple with a nice change of subject.

"So, uh, how did you guys meet?"

The two men shared a private look, soft and intimate, before Barry smiled, "We met in college. Two eighteen-year-old idiots stuck together in a dorm for four years."

"Oh my god, they were roommates," Richie gasped, clearly referencing something that just wouldn't come to Eddie in that moment.

"But we uh, we only started dating this year. After a lot of misunderstanding and soul-searching and striking out on Grindr."

Eddie and Richie laughed as Frankie patted Barry's knee, "All behind us now, thank god."

"What about you guys?" Barry gestured between them, "Richie said in his special that you two grew up together?"

Oh, yeah. How could Eddie possibly forget his very prominent role in Richie's latest set. Listening to him talk about their life, love and everything in between was like having firsthand and secondhand embarrassment at the same time, while also being deeply, fiercely proud.

His feelings were mixed, to say the least.

*("So my boyfriend and I were born less than an hour apart. Him first at 11:35pm on March 6th, 1976, then me, at quarter-after-midnight on March 7th, 1976. For those of us shitty at math, let me lay it out for you. There are only forty minutes between our ages. He is only forty fucking minutes older than me. Which begs the question – why the hell does he act like a grouchy 89-year-old deprived of his M*A*S*H reruns, while I am the pinnacle of youthful exuberance? Yeah, I said 'exuberance.' Shocking, I know. But Eds is also a reader, so I am too by assimilation. I can't fucking escape his crazy fucking audiobook collection that he insists on putting on in the car every morning because he just loves to know all about the war, how millennials are killing the mayonnaise industry and—god, I know we're Gen X but the boomer-energy is real. Fuck.")*

"Yeah, we grew up in a shitty town in Maine. I remember when this guy used to eat his own boogers," Eddie paused, shrugging, "Which, you know, was only last week, so—"

Richie wound his arm around Eddie's shoulder and effectively cut him off.

"Don't listen to this Loser. He knows not of what he speaks. Eds and I have been crazy in love, Beyoncé and Jay Z-style since the late '80s. But you know, minus the cheating, public meltdowns with siblings and like a couple hundred million dollars. But yeah, we have a love

story for the ages, one to rival the greats, Romeo and Juliet, Bonnie and Clyde, Ross and Rachel.”

“Double-suicide, death by cop, and leaving the career-opportunity of a lifetime to spend an eternity with Mr Misogyny himself. You realize you’re listing tragedies, right?” Eddie asked, turning to him with a tilt of his head.

Before Richie could no doubt argue his flawed point, a booming voice called out from the stage:

“Okay, ladies and gentlemen, please take your seats and ready your glasses, Mr and Mrs Hanscom have arrived!”

Frankie quirked an eyebrow at them, “Thought Ben’s plan was to be Mr Ben Marsh?”

“It does have a nice ring to it,” Richie agreed with a wave of his hand, raising his voice slightly, “It’s the twenty-first-century, people. Let straight white men take their wives’ names. Or at least hyphenate. Haven’t they been oppressed enough?”

The quartet shared a chuckle, before Eddie announced, “And that’s our cue. Nice meeting you, Barry, and seeing you again, Frankie. Thanks for the bread.”

Both he and Richie shook hands with each of the men and began making their way towards the table at the top of the room, where

Martha, Ben's mom Arlene, and the rest of the Losers were already taking their seats.

"You know what's after this, right?" Richie mumbled out of the side of his mouth as he sat down three seats to Eddie's right, leaving two seats in the middle empty for the bride and groom.

Eddie winced, "Yeah. Don't remind me, asshole."

Richie threw him what he supposed was meant to be a sympathetic and reassuring look, but instead came out as constipated with a side of smug.

"Don't stress, Eds. You'll rock it. From the bits and pieces I overheard, you got it in the bag."

Eddie leveled him with his best sarcastic scowl. He had perfected many over the years.

"Me? Stress? Wouldn't dream of it."

Notes for the Chapter:

Did I once hear my dad say the phrase "They're penny-wise, pound-foolish" and think to myself that there's a good IT joke in there somewhere? Maybe. Who knows. I'm not a comedian. Richie on the other hand...

Would love to hear what you think :)